

HIS EXCELLENCY
EUGÈNE ROUGON.

A REALISTIC NOVEL.

BY

ÉMILE ZOLA.

Translated without abridgement from the 22nd
French Edition.



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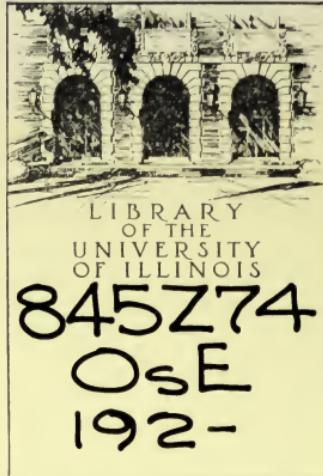
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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

No series of works purporting to portray the social life and manners of France under the Second Empire would be complete if politics were altogether ignored in it ; and M. Emile Zola, bearing this fact in mind, has in the present volume supplied many political touches calculated to perfect his Rougon-Macquart pictures. However, it must not for one moment be supposed that "His Excellency Eugène Rougon" is by any means a prosy study of the Imperial system of government. It deals rather with the by-ways of politics, with the venality and underhand intriguing which prevailed in France whilst the third Napoleon sat upon the throne : and the various historical incidents which are recorded in the story, such as certain famous sittings of the Corps Législatif, the baptism of the Prince Imperial, the attempt made by Orsini and his confederates upon the life of the Emperor, the rise and fall of different coteries and parties, serve merely as the foundation for a narrative of genuine interest.

M. Zola, it may be mentioned, is a Republican, a member of that moderate-minded and patiently persevering party which, for several years, has been striving to establish a liberal rule in France upon a solid basis of law and order. As a firm believer

in popular rights, social equality, primordial truth and justice, he could only pass condemnation upon the *régime* which was the outcome of that gloomy Second of December, when, as the poet puts it—

“Napoleon caught the fair
And fierce Republic with the feet of fire,
And stayed with iron chains and bands
Her flight, and Freedom's, in a hundred lands.”

It should be mentioned though, that in the following pages, M. Zola does not swerve from his story to indulge in any vituperative abuse. He allows events to speak for themselves ; he paints the Imperial court as it really existed. His hero, Eugène Rougon, is the Imperial system, embodied in the flesh. He is M. Rouher, M. Billault, M. Baroche and General Espinasse, blended into one. He displays, too, at times, certain characteristics which distinguished M. Fialin de Persigny ; and, as a set off to his cumbrous personality which pervades the entire story, we have the witty and courtly M. de Marsy (the Duke de Morny), and the handsome but shallow Delestang (M. Delangle). Now and then, perhaps, as the narrative progresses, the feelings of the English reader may be slightly offended ; for Englishmen, as a rule, regard the third Napoleon as a heaven-born genius providentially appointed to guide the destinies of France, whereas the vast majority of Frenchmen consider him to have been an unscrupulous adventurer who pounced down upon their country with purposes of self-gratification alone in view. The prosperity which prevailed in France under the Second Empire was not due to Napoleon III, they say, but to the wondrous vitality of the nation, which even to-day still ranks as one of the foremost in the world, despite its terrible vicissitudes. This, too, is the view which M. Zola takes of

France under the Empire; and in all probability history will endorse his opinion.

We have not sufficient space here to review the entire story of Eugène Rougon's career, but all those who have studied the standard works of Taxile Delord and Ernest Hamel will admit that it presents a faithful picture of the earlier years of the Imperial *régime*. The arrests and proscriptions which followed upon the Orsini affair are matter of history, and were carried out exactly as M. Zola states; the account of the death of the old notary, brutally arrested whilst life was ebbing from him, is founded upon fact—indeed, the real victim was a near relative of M. Hamel, the historian; the ridiculous discussions at the ministerial council under the Emperor's presidency also really occurred, as was conclusively proved by the state papers found at the Tuileries after the Revolution of 1870; moreover, the speeches, so ingeniously dovetailed into the story, are taken almost word for word from the official *Moniteur*; and, in the same way, the descriptions of court life at Compiègne are borrowed from the most trustworthy contemporary records.

Indeed, few if any historical novels have excelled "His Excellency Eugène Rougon," as regards veracity; and so far as portraiture and delineation of character are concerned, M. Zola has in this book fairly surpassed himself. Clorinde, the Italian beauty, is a perfect presentment of one of the many adventuresses who swept down upon France after the establishment of the Empire. The versatile Chevalier Rusconi will at the very moment of his introduction to the reader, be recognized as the Chevalier Nigra, who for so many years represented the Italian court at the Tuileries. Kahn, the jobbing deputy, Jobelin, the hungry colonel, Du Poizat, the unscrupu-

lous sub-prefect, will also be familiar characters to all who are conversant with the by-ways of Imperial politics; whilst in La Rouquette, the dandified embryo statesman, the educated reader will immediately recognise a noteworthy politician—M. de Forcade La Roquette in his younger days. There are passing glimpses too of those rival beauties, Mesdames de Metternich and de Galliffet; for a moment also Montalembert's pale face and long tawny hair peer above the legislative tribune; and once or twice the widowed lady of Farnborough flits across the scene, depicted in all her beauty and amiability, just as she really appeared, during those

“days of halcyon weather,
That Martin's summer when the nation swam
Aimless and easy as a wayward feather,
Down the full tide of jest and epigram.”

In conclusion, it should be stated that whilst the curious reader will find ample opportunities for exercising his patience and ingenuity in discovering the real names of M. Zola's personages, and tracing the various incidents he describes to their historical source, the ordinary reader, who knows nothing or cares nothing about the secret history of France during 1852 and 1860, can take the story as it stands, and, quite unmindful of its basis of facts, derive real enjoyment from it. So skilfully are the various characters delineated, so naturally does one event lead up to another in this narrative of human power and weakness, that, after perusing it, we are tempted to exclaim: “This is life indeed.”

HIS EXCELLENCE EUGÈNE ROUGON.

CHAPTER I.

THE president still remained standing in the midst of the slight commotion which his entrance had just caused. Then he took his seat, as he said carelessly and in an undertone:

“The sitting has commenced.”

He then began to arrange the bills which were laid upon the desk in front of him. On his left, a short-sighted clerk, with his nose close to the paper, was reading the minutes of the last sitting in a rapid confused manner, none of the deputies paying any attention to him. In the buzzing noise that filled the chamber the minutes were heard merely by the ushers, who maintained a very dignified and decorous bearing in the midst of the lounging, leisurely attitudes of the deputies.

There were not a hundred members present. Some of them were lying back in their red velvet-covered seats, with listless blank eyes, already half-asleep. Others were leaning over the edge of their desks, as though wearied by the compulsory labour of this public sitting and were beating a gentle tattoo on the mahogany with the tips of their fingers. Through the ceiling window, which revealed a crescent of grey sky, the light of a rainy May afternoon streamed perpendicularly down and evenly illuminated the pompous severity of the chamber. It spread itself over the desks in a flood of gloomy ruddiness, lighted up here and there into a rosy glow where some seat remained unoccupied; while, behind the president, the statues and sculpture-work stood out coldly white and conspicuous.

One of the deputies on the third row to the right still remained standing in the narrow passage. He was rubbing his rough growth of grizzly beard with one hand with a pre-occupied

expression. Just then an usher came by and the deputy stopped him and asked him a question in an undertone.

“No, Monsieur Kahn,” replied the usher; “Monsieur le Président of the Council of State has not yet arrived.”

Monsieur Kahn then sat down, and abruptly turning round towards his neighbour on the left, he said :

“Tell me, Béjuin, have you seen Rougon this morning ?”

Monsieur Béjuin, a small thin man of dark complexion and silent demeanour, raised his head. He blinked his eyes and his thoughts seemed altogether elsewhere. He had drawn out the slide of his desk and was busily engaged in writing letters on blue paper with a business heading containing these words : “Béjuin and Co. The Saint Florent Cut-Glass Works.”

“Rougon ?” he repeated. “No, I haven’t seen him. I have not had time to go over to the State Council.”

Then he quietly devoted himself to his work again. He consulted a memorandum-book and began a second letter, amidst the confused buzzing of the clerk who was finishing reading the minutes.

Monsieur Kahn leant back in his seat and crossed his arms. He had a face with strongly marked features, and his big nose testified to his Jewish descent. He seemed vexed and impatient. He gazed upwards at the gilt rose work on the ceiling and listened to the plashing of a heavy fall of rain which just at this moment burst down upon the glass of the sky-light, and then with vaguely wondering eyes he seemed to be examining the complicated ornamentation of the great wall in front of him. His glance rested for a second or two at each end of it upon the two panels hung with green velvet and decked with gilt symbolic figures. Then, after he had scanned the pairs of columns between which the allegorical statues of Liberty and Public Order showed their marble faces and pupil-less eyes, his attention was absorbed by the curtain of green silk which concealed the fresco representing Louis Philippe taking the oath to the Constitution.

By this time the clerk had sat down, but the chamber was still full of buzzing confusion. The president was still leisurely arranging his papers. He kept mechanically ringing his bell without its loud sound in the slightest degree checking any of the private conversations that were going on. Then he stood up in the midst of all the noise and remained waiting for a moment in silence.

“Gentlemen,” then he began, “I have received a letter—”

He stopped short to ring his bell again and kept silent for a second or two, his grave and weary face looking down from the monumental desk which spread out beneath him its panels of red marble bordered with white. His buttoned frock-coat stood out against the bas-relief behind his desk rising up like a black bar between the peplums of Agriculture and Industry with their antique profiles.

“Gentlemen,” he continued, when he had succeeded in obtaining something like silence, “I have received a letter from Monsieur de Lamberthon in which he apologizes for not being able to attend to-day’s sitting.”

A slight laugh was heard from the sixth row of seats in front of the desk. It came from a quite young deputy, who could not be more than twenty-eight years old at the most. He was fair and effeminately pretty, and was trying to stifle with his white hands an outburst of girlish rippling laughter. One of his colleagues, a man of huge size, came up to him and whispered in his ear :

“Is it really true that Lamberthon has found his wife ? Tell me all about it, La Rouquette.”

The president had taken up a handful of papers. He was speaking in monotonous tones, and stray fragments of sentences reached the end of the chamber.

“There are requests for leave of absence—Monsieur Blachet, Monsieur Buquin-Lecomte, Monsieur de la Villardière—”

While the chamber was being consulted upon the subject and was granting the different requests for leave of absence, Monsieur Kahn, who had probably grown weary of examining the green silk curtain that was stretched across the seditious portrait of Louis Philippe, had turned half-round to glance at the galleries. Above the wall of yellow marble streaked with black, there was a single-tiered gallery, with hand-rests of amaranthine velvet, spanning the spaces from one column to another ; while still higher up a mantle of embossed leather failed to conceal the gaps which had been caused by the suppression of a second tier, which had been devoted to journalists and the public previous to the Empire. The narrow gloomy boxes between the massive yellowish marble pillars which displayed their somewhat heavy splendour round the semi-circle were for the most part empty, although here and there brightened by the light-tinted toilettes of three or four ladies.

"Ah! so Colonel Jobelin has come!" murmured Monsieur Kahn.

He smiled at the colonel, whose glance had fallen on him. Colonel Jobelin was wearing the dark-blue frock-coat which he had adopted as a kind of civilian uniform since his retirement. He was quite alone in the questors' gallery, and his officer's rosette was so large as to look almost like the bow of a cravat.

Monsieur Kahn's eyes now rested farther away to the left upon a young man and woman who were affectionately squeezing themselves close together in a corner of the gallery of the Council of State. The young man kept bending his head aside every moment and whispering something into the young woman's neck, at which she smiled with a gentle air, but without turning to look at him, her eyes being fixed upon the allegorical figure of Public Order.

"I say, Béjuin," the deputy now remarked, nudging his colleague's knee.

Monsieur Béjuin was now busy with his fifth letter. He raised his head with an expression of preoccupation.

"Look up there," continued Monsieur Kahn; "don't you see that little Escorailles and pretty Madame Bouchard? I'll be bound he's pinching her hips. What die-away eyes she's got! All Rougon's friends seem to have made a point of coming to-day. There's Madame Correur and the two Charbonnel up there in the public gallery."

The bell sounded again with a prolonged note, and an usher called out in a fine bass voice: "Silence, gentlemen!" The deputies began to listen. Then the president said the following words, not a syllable of which was lost:

"Monsieur Kahn asks permission to be allowed to publish the speech which he delivered in reference to the bill for the establishment of a municipal tax upon vehicles and horses in Paris."

A murmur ran along the benches, and the different conversations were resumed again. Monsieur La Rouquette came and sat down near Monsieur Kahn.

"You are busy working for the people, eh?" he said, playfully, and then, without waiting for any reply, he added:

"You haven't seen anything of Rougon, I suppose, or heard anything? Everyone is talking about the matter, but it seems that there is nothing definitely settled yet."

He turned round and glanced at the clock.

"Twenty minutes past two already!" he exclaimed. "Well, I should certainly be off now, if it were not for the reading of that confounded report. Is it really to come off to-day?"

"We have all been notified to that effect," Monsieur Kahn replied; "and I have heard nothing of any change of plans. You had better remain. The four hundred thousand francs for the baptism will be voted directly."

"No doubt," said Monsieur La Rouquette. "That old general Legrain, who has now lost the use of both his legs, has had himself carried here by his servant, and he is now in the Conférence Hall waiting till the vote comes on. The Emperor is quite right in reckoning upon the devotion of the whole of the Corps Législatif. All our votes ought to be given him upon this solemn occasion."

The young deputy did his utmost to assume the serious expression of a politician. His doll-like face, which was ornamented by a few pale hairs, wagged gravely over his collar, and he seemed to be relishing the flavour of the two last sentences he had uttered, which he had remembered from some speech that he had heard. Then he suddenly broke out into a laugh.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed, "what a sight those Charbonnels are!"

Then Monsieur Kahn and himself began to be merry at the Charbonnels' expense. The wife was wearing an outrageous yellow shawl, and her husband wore a country-cut frock-coat, which seemed as though it had been hewn into shape with an axe. They were both very stout and red, and they were pressing eagerly forward, with their chins almost resting upon the balustrade of the gallery, to get a better view of the proceedings, which their blank and staring eyes seemed to tell were utterly unintelligible to them.

"If Rougon takes himself off," Monsieur La Rouquette said, "I wouldn't give a couple of sous for the Charbonnels' case. It will be just the same with Madame Correur."

Here he bent his head towards Monsieur Kahn's ear, and continued in a very low tone:

"You, now, who know Rougon, just tell me who and what this Madame Correur is. She has kept a boarding-house, hasn't she? Rougon used to lodge with her, and it is even said that she lent him money. What does she do now?"

Monsieur Kahn had assumed a very grave expression, and he began to rub his rough beard slowly.

“ Madame Correur is a highly respectable lady,” he replied shortly.

This answer checked Monsieur La Rouquette’s curiosity. He bit his lips with the expression of a school-boy who has just been punished with an imposition. They both looked in silence for a moment at Madame Correur, who was sitting near the Charbonnells. She was wearing a very showy dress of mauve silk, and a large amount of lace and ornaments. Her face showed too much colour, her forehead was covered with pale little dollish curls, and her plump neck, still very beautiful in spite of her forty-eight years, was exposed to view.

Just at this moment the sudden sound of a door opening and the rustle of skirts at the far end of the chamber caused all heads to be turned in that direction. A tall girl, exquisitely beautiful, but strangely dressed in an ill-made sea-green satin dress, had just entered the box assigned to the diplomatic body, followed by an elderly lady in black.

“ Ah ! it is the fair Clorinde ! ” said Monsieur La Rouquette, who had risen to bow at random.

Monsieur Kahn had also risen. He stooped towards Monsieur Béjuin, who was busily engaged enclosing his letters in envelopes.

“ The Countess Balbi and her daughter are there,” he said. “ I am going up to ask them if they have seen Rougon.”

The president had taken up a fresh handful of papers from his desk. Without ceasing his perusal of them, he cast a glance at the beautiful Clorinde Balbi, whose arrival gave rise to a buzz of observations in the chamber. Then, while he passed the papers one by one to a clerk, he said in monotonous tones and without pausing to punctuate his words :

“ Draft of a bill to continue certain extra duties in the town of Lille. Draft of a bill to unite into one single commune the communes of Doulevant-le-Petit and Ville-en-Blaisais (Haute-Marne)—”

When Monsieur Kahn came back again he seemed quite disconsolate.

“ Really, no one seems to have seen anything of him,” he said to his colleagues, Béjuin and La Rouquette, whom he met at the foot of the semi-circle. “ I hear that the Emperor sent for him yesterday evening, but I have not been able to learn

what was the result of their interview. There is nothing so provoking as not being able to get a satisfactory account of what has happened."

Monsieur La Rouquette turned round and whispered into Monsieur Béjuin's ear :

"Poor Kahn is terribly afraid lest Rougon should get into disfavour at the Tuileries. He might fish for his railway if that happened."

Monsieur Béjuin, who was of a very taciturn disposition, said very gravely :

"The day that Rougon retires from the Council of State, we shall all be losers."

Then he beckoned to one of the ushers and gave him the letters which he had just written, to post for him.

The three deputies remained standing to the left of the president's desk, discreetly discussing the disfavour with which Rougon was threatened. It was a complicated story. A distant relation of the Empress, one Monsieur Rodriguez, had been making a claim for a sum of two million francs from the French government since the year 1808. During the war with Spain, a vessel belonging to this Rodriguez, who was a shipowner, loaded with sugar and coffee, had been taken in the Bay of Biscay by a French frigate, the *Vigilante*, and brought to Brest. Acting upon the information which he had received from the local commission, the administrative official had declared the capture to be a valid one, without referring the matter to the Prize-Committee. Rodriguez, however, had promptly appealed to the Council of State, and, after his death, his son had, under all the successive governments, vainly tried to bring the matter to an issue until the day when a word from his distant cousin, now become all-powerful, had secured the insertion of his action in the official cause-list.

The three deputies could hear the president's monotonous voice still murmuring on above their heads.

"Draft of a bill to authorise the department of Calvados to borrow three hundred thousand francs. Draft of a bill authorising the town of Amiens to borrow two hundred thousand francs for the purpose of making new promenades. Draft of a bill authorising the department of Côtes-du-Nord to borrow three hundred and forty-five thousand francs to cover the deficiencies in the revenues of the last five years."

"The truth is," said Monsieur Kahn, again lowering his voice

"that this Rodriguez had a very artful method of managing his business. He and a son-in-law of his, stationed at New York, were the owners of vessels which sailed at one time under the American flag and at another under the Spanish, according as one or the other might seem to subject the ships to the least risk during their passage. Rougon has told me that the captured vessel was exclusively the property of Rodriguez, and that there is no valid ground whatever for the claims that are made."

"And then," interposed Monsieur Béjuin, "the steps that were taken by the officials cannot be impugned. The administrative officer at Brest was perfectly right in declaring the capture a valid one in accordance with the customs of the port, without referring the matter to the Prize-Committee."

Then they lapsed into silence for a moment or two, while Monsieur La Rouquette leant his back against the marble wall, raised his head, and tried to engage the attention of the fair Clorinde.

"But," he asked, naïvely, "why does Rougon object to their paying the two millions to Rodriguez? What difference would it make to him?"

"It is a matter of conscience," said Monsieur Kahn, solemnly.

Monsieur La Rouquette glanced at his colleagues one after the other, but, seeing them both looking so grave, he did not even smile.

"Then," continued Monsieur Kahn, as though he were dwelling upon some thought which he had not uttered aloud, "Rougon has had a good deal of bother since Marsy has been Minister of the Interior. They have never been able to get on with one another. Rougon himself told me that, if it had not been for his attachment to the Emperor, for whom he has already done so much, he would have long ago retired into private life. He is now no longer at his ease at the Tuilleries, and he feels that a change has become necessary for him."

"He is acting like an honourable man," remarked Monsieur Béjuin.

"Yes, indeed," said Monsieur La Rouquette, with a wise look, "if he wants to retire, the opportunity is a good one. All the same, however, his friends will be greatly grieved. Just look at the colonel up there, with his anxious face? He has been hoping to fasten the red ribbon round his neck on

the fifteenth of next August. And pretty Madame Bouchard, too, swore that the worthy Monsieur Bouchard should be a chief clerk at the office of the Interior before six months are over. Little Escorailles, Rougon's pet, was to put the nomination under Monsieur Bouchard's napkin on Madame's birthday. But where have they got to, pretty Madame Bouchard and little Escorailles?"

The three deputies looked about for them, and they at last discovered them at the back of the gallery, in the front of which they had been seated at the opening of the sitting. They had taken refuge in the shadow there behind a bald old gentleman, and they were both sitting there very quiet, though very red.

The president was now coming to the conclusion of his reading.

"Draft of a bill to authorise an increase in the rate of interest upon the loan authorised by an act of the ninth of June, 1853, and an extraordinary rate in the department of La Manche."

Monsieur Kahn had just run forward to meet a deputy who was entering the chamber. As he brought him along with him, he said :

"Here is Monsieur de Combelot. He will give us some news."

Monsieur de Combelot, a chamberlain whom the department of the Landes had chosen as deputy upon the formally expressed desire of the Emperor, bowed with a discreet air, and waited to be questioned. He was a tall, handsome man, with a very white skin, and an inky black beard, which had been the means of winning him great successes among the ladies.

"Well," said Monsieur Kahn, interrogatively, "what do they say at the château? What has the Emperor decided upon?"

"Well, indeed," replied Monsieur de Combelot in a guttural tone, "they say a good many things. The Emperor has the warmest friendship for the President of the Council of State. There is no doubt at all that their interview was of the most cordial nature. Yes, indeed, it was most cordial."

Then he stopped, after having, as it were, carefully weighed the expression so as to satisfy himself that he had not said too much.

"Then the resignation is withdrawn?" asked Monsieur Kahn, with glistening eyes.

“ I did not say that,” replied the chamberlain, very uneasily. “ I know nothing about it. You understand that my position is a peculiar one—”

He did not finish what he was going to say, but contented himself with merely smiling, and then hurried off to take his seat. Monsieur Kahn shrugged his shoulders, and then, addressing himself to Monsieur La Rouquette, he said :

“ But you, surely, ought to be posted up in what is going on ? Doesn’t your sister, Madame de Lorentz, give you any information ? ”

“ Oh, my sister is even more reserved than Monsieur de Combelot,” replied the young deputy, with a laugh. “ Since she has become one of the ladies-in-waiting, she has acquired quite ministerial gravity. Though yesterday, indeed, she assured me that the resignation would be accepted. By the way, I can tell you a funny story in connection with this matter. It appears that some lady was sent to Rougon to try to influence him. Now, you would never guess what Rougon did ! He just turned her out of doors, although she was a delicious creature ! ”

“ Rougon is a very chaste steady fellow,” Monsieur Béjin declared solemnly.

Monsieur La Rouquette shook with laughter. He protested against Monsieur Béjin’s judgment of Rougon, and he could have cited facts against it if he liked.

“ And so, Madame Correur, for instance,” said he.

“ Pooh ! you don’t know the truth of that story,” replied Monsieur Kahn.

“ And the fair Clorinde ? ”

“ Nonsense, nonsense ! Rougon is much too clever a fellow to forget himself with such a wild creature as that ! ”

Then the two men drew closer towards each other, and commenced a broad conversation, without any mincing of words. They repeated to each other the stories which were told about these two Italian women—mother and daughter—who were half adventuresses and half great ladies, and who were to be met everywhere, in the thick of all the parties and gatherings, at the houses of ministers, in the stage-boxes of minor theatres, on the sands at fashionable watering-places, and in out-of-the-way inns. The mother, it was said, had been the mistress of a royal personage; and the daughter, with an ignorance of French customs and etiquette which earned her the reputation of being a wild and

badly brought-up scapegrace, went galloping madly about on horseback, exhibited her dirty stockings and boots worn down at the heels on the pavement on rainy days, and looked about her for a husband with the bold smiles of a ripe woman. Monsieur La Rouquette told how she had come one night to a ball at the Chevalier Rusconi's, the Italian Minister's, in the character of the huntress Diana, and in such a state of nudity that she had all but been asked in marriage the next morning by old Monsieur de Nougarède, a very warm old senator. During the narration of this story, the three deputies kept casting glances at the fair Clorinde, who, in spite of the regulations, was examining the members of the Chamber one after another through a large pair of opera-glasses.

"No, no!" Monsieur Kahn repeated, "Rougon would never be such a fool! He says, though, that she is very intelligent, and he nicknames her 'Mademoiselle Machiavelli.' She amuses him, but that's all."

"All the same Rougon is wrong in not marrying," said Monsieur Béjuin. "It settles a man."

Then they all three set to work to discuss the sort of woman that it was desirable Rougon should marry. She ought to be a woman of some age, thirty-five at the least, they said, rich, and one who would maintain her house on a footing of high decorum and reputation.

The buzzing noise and confusion in the Chamber still went on, and the three deputies were so absorbed in the indelicate stories they were telling each other, that they ceased to notice what was taking place around them. Away in the distance, they could faintly hear the voices of the ushers calling out, "To the sitting, gentlemen, to the sitting."

The deputies were entering from all sides through the folding doors of massive mahogany, with panels gleaming with golden stars. The Chamber, which had hitherto been half empty, was now filling gradually. The scattered little groups of members talking to each other from one row of seats to another, with an expression of weariness on their faces, and the deputies, who were dozing, and trying to conceal their yawns, were now being lost to view in the increasing crowd and general shaking of hands. As the members took their seats, they glanced smilingly round them; there was a general almost family likeness about them, and they all seemed equally intent upon performing the duties which had brought them together. A stout man, on the last row to the

left, had fallen asleep, and was awakened by his neighbour ; and, when the latter whispered a few words in his ear, he hastily rubbed his eyes, and assumed a more decorous attitude. The sitting, after having dragged its way wearily through a series of petty technical details, was at last going to become supremely interesting.

Monsieur Kahn and his two colleagues were being gradually driven by the increasing crowd towards their seats, almost without being aware of it. They went on with their conversation, breaking out occasionally into bursts of suppressed laughter. Monsieur La Rouquette began a fresh story about the fair Clorinde. She had taken a strange whim into her head one day, he said, to have her room hung with black, spangled with silver tears, and to hold a reception of her friends there ; she herself lying in bed, covered up with black drapery which allowed scarcely anything more than her nose to appear.

As Monsieur Kahn at last took his seat, his recollection suddenly returned to him.

“ La Rouquette is a foolish chatterbox,” he muttered ; “ he has made me miss Rougon.”

Then he turned towards his neighbour and exclaimed angrily :

“ You really might have reminded me, Béjuin ! ”

Rougon, who had just been introduced with the customary ceremonial, had already taken his seat between two members of the Council of State on the government bench, a sort of huge mahogany box, situated beneath the president’s desk and in the place of the suppressed tribune. His large shoulders tightly distended his uniform of green cloth, ornamented with gold braid at the neck and on the sleeves. His face, with his thick grizzly hair clustering over his square brow, was turned towards the body of the chamber, and his eyes were hidden beneath his half-dropped heavy eyelids. The common-place plainness of his big nose his fleshy lips and his long cheeks, in which his forty-six years had not yet planted a single wrinkle, was lit up every now and then into something like beauty by his appearance of strength and energy. He sat perfectly quiet, leaning back with his chin resting on the top of his coat, apparently noticing no one and seeming quite indifferent and a little weary.

“ He looks just as he does every day,” Monsieur Béjuin remarked.

The deputies were leaning over their desks to observe him.

Whispered observations as to his appearance were buzzed from ear to ear. In the galleries especially Rougon's entrance had caused a feeling of lively excitement. The Charbonnels, in their desire to let their presence be known, craned out their enraptured faces at the risk of falling over. Madame Correur coughed slightly and drew out a handkerchief which she waved gently, while pretending to carry it to her lips. Colonel Jobelin straightened himself, and pretty Madame Bouchard hurried down again to the front row, panting a little and tying her bonnet-strings afresh, while Monsieur d'Escorailles remained quite still and seemed much annoyed. As for the fair Clorinde she did not beat about the bush. Seeing that Rougon did not raise his eyes, she began to tap her opera-glass very audibly upon the marble column against which she was leaning, and then, as these tactics did not succeed in attracting his attention, she said to her mother in such a clear sounding voice that every one in the chamber could hear her :

“ He's in the sulks, the fat sly fellow ! ”

Several of the deputies looked round and smiled, and Rougon himself at last glanced up at the fair Clorinde. As he nodded his head almost imperceptibly towards her, she triumphantly clapped her hands, and leant back, laughing and talking quite loudly to her mother, without taking the least notice of the men down below who were staring at her.

Before Rougon dropped his eyes again he glanced slowly round the gallery, where his comprehensive gaze took in at once Madame Bouchard, Colonel Jobelin, Madame Correur, and the Charbonnels. His face remained quite blank and expressionless. He again let his chin drop down on to his coat, and he half-closed his eyes as he stifled a slight yawn.

“ I'll go and have a word with him now,” Monsieur Kahn whispered into Monsieur Béjuin's ear.

Just, however, as he was rising from his seat, the president, who during the last moment or two had been looking round to see that all the deputies were in their places, rang his bell authoritatively. Then all at once there was a profound silence.

A fair-haired member in the first row now stood up. In his hand he held a large sheet of paper upon which he kept his eyes fixed as he spoke.

“ I have the honour,” he said in a sing-song voice, “ to present a report upon the bill by which it is proposed to include among

the estimates for 1856, a sum of four hundred thousand francs to defray the expenses of the ceremonies and rejoicings connected with the baptism of the Prince Imperial."

Then he stepped slowly forward as though he were going to lay the paper on the table of the Chamber, but all the deputies cried out in perfect unanimity :

"Read it ! Read it !"

The deputy who had prepared the report waited till the president sanctioned the reading of it. Then he commenced in a voice that seemed affected with emotion :

"Gentlemen, the bill which has been brought before us is one of those which make the customary formalities of voting seem too dilatory, for they prevent the Chamber from acting on its enthusiastic impulses.

"Hear ! hear !" cried several of the members.

"In the humblest families," continued the speaker in carefully modulated tones, "the birth of a son and heir, with all the ideas of transmission which are attached to that title, is a source of such sweet joy that the trials of the past are forgotten and hope alone hovers round the cradle of the newborn child. What then shall we say of this happy event when it not only prompts the joy of a family but that of a great nation, and is an event of European interest ?"

There was a tremendous outburst of applause at this piece of rhetoric which thrilled the Chamber with emotion. Rougon, who appeared to be asleep, could see nothing in front of him but beaming faces. Some of the deputies accentuated their attention, holding their hands to the sides of their ears so that they might lose nothing of this carefully prepared speech. The speaker, after a slight pause, raised his voice as he continued :

"To-day, gentlemen, it is indeed the great family of France that is inviting all its members to give expression to their joy, and what pomp and circumstance would be magnificent enough if it were possible by display to express the grandeur of our legitimate hopes ?" Here the speaker paused again.

"Hear ! hear !" cried the deputies.

"That's very nicely put," Monsieur Kahn remarked ; "isn't it, Béjuin ?"

Monsieur Béjuin nodded his head, keeping his eyes fixed on the cut-glass chandelier which hung down from the window-ceiling in front of the president's desk.

In the gallery the fair Clorinde kept her opera-glass fixed to her eyes and lost not a single expression of the speaker's face. The Charbonnels' eyes were quite moist, and Madame Correur assumed a decorously attentive attitude, while the colonel expressed his approbation by nodding his head, and pretty Madame Bouchard allowed herself to lean against Monsieur d'Escorailles' knees. The president and the clerk and the ushers listened solemnly, without making the slightest gesture.

"The cradle of the Prince Imperial," resumed the speaker, "is henceforth our security for the future; for, in perpetuating the dynasty which we have all acclaimed, it assures the prosperity of our country, its repose and stability, and, through ours, that of the rest of Europe."

Cries of "hush! hush!" were necessary to subdue the burst of enthusiastic applause which had broken out at this touching reference to the cradle.

"Once before a scion of this illustrious race seemed equally intended for a great destiny, but his time and our own have no similarity. Peace is the result of the wise and profound rule of which we are now reaping the fruits, just as the genius of war dictated that epic poem which makes up the story of the first Empire.

"Hailed at his birth by the cannons which from north to south thundered out the success of our arms, the King of Rome was not even permitted to serve his country, so, indeed, Providence then decreed."

"What is that he's saying? He's putting his foot into it," said the sceptical Monsieur La Rouquette. "That is very clumsy, and he is spoiling the effect of his speech."

The deputies certainly seemed uneasy. Why was this historical reference dragged in to damp their enthusiasm? Several of them began to blow their noses. The speaker, however, only smiled when he saw the chilling effect of his last sentences. He raised his voice and pursued his antithesis, carefully modulating his tones and evidently being quite confident of making his point.

"But, coming to us at one of those momentous times when the birth of a single life may be regarded as the salvation of all, the Child of France to-day gives to us and to all future generations the right and the privilege of living and dying at our ancestral firesides. Such is the promise which the divine kindness has vouchsafed to us."

This took admirably, going home to the hearts of all the deputies, and a murmur of pleasure passed through the Chamber. The assurance of an everlasting peace was very charming. The tranquillised members once more wore the pleased expressions of politicians revelling in a fine piece of rhetoric. There was nothing to disturb them. Europe belonged to their master.

“The Emperor,” continued the speaker with fresh vigour, “having become the arbiter of Europe, was about to sign that noble peace, which, bringing together the productive forces of the different nations, is as much an alliance of peoples as of monarchs, when God was pleased to fill the cup of his happiness as well as that of his glory. Is it not allowable to think that, at that moment, he foresaw many fair and prosperous years while gazing upon that cradle where slumbers, though now but an infant, the heir who is destined to carry on his magnificent policy ?”

This, too, was very warmly received. Such a hope might be justifiably entertained, so the deputies said, as they nodded their heads approvingly. The report, however, was now beginning to seem a little long, and several of the members were looking solemn again ; some of them even glanced at the gallery out of the corners of their eyes like practical matter-of-fact politicians who felt rather ashamed of being thus seen spending their time in this unbusiness-like way. Others ceased to pay any attention to what was being said, and absorbed themselves in the consideration of their own affairs, again beginning to tap the mahogany of their desks with the tips of their fingers ; while through the minds of others there flitted vague recollections of other sittings where professions of devotion and high expectations had been lavished with equal enthusiasm around some other cradle.

As for Monsieur La Rouquette, he very frequently turned round to look at the clock, and when the hands pointed to a quarter to three an expression of desperation passed across his face. He was going to miss an appointment. Monsieur Kahn and Monsieur Béjuin sat motionlessly side by side, with crossed arms and blinking eyes, which wandered on from the great velvet panels to the *bas-relief* of white marble across which the president’s frock-coat stretched like a black bar. In the diplomats’ gallery the fair Clorinde was still gazing through her opera-glass. She was now engaged upon a lengthy examination of Rougon, who sat with the majestic mien of a sleeping bull.

The speaker showed no signs of hurry, and he listened to

himself as he read on, indulging in a rhythmic beatifical motion of his shoulders.

“ Let us then display full and complete confidence, and may the Corps Législatif, upon this great and solemn occasion, bear in mind that the Emperor and itself have a common origin, which almost confers upon it a family-right the more than the other state bodies possess to share in its Sovereign’s joy.

“ The Corps Législatif, like himself, the offspring of the willing vote of the people, becomes now the mouth-piece of the nation in offering to the august child the homage of its unchangeable respect, of its devotion that nothing can destroy, and of that boundless love which converts our political faith into a religion whose duties are pleasures.”

The mention of homage and religion and duties seemed to betoken that the speaker was drawing near to a conclusion. The Charbonnels ventured to exchange remarks in low tones, and Madame Correur stifled a slight cough in her handkerchief. Madame Bouchard quietly returned to the back of the gallery assigned to the Council of State and resumed her seat near Monsieur Jules d’Escorailles.

The speaker now suddenly altered his tone and came down from the solemn to the familiar, as he quickly gabbled out :

“ We propose to you, gentlemen, the adoption of the bill which has been brought forward by the Council of State.”

Then he resumed his seat in the midst of general applause. Shouts of “ hear ! hear !” rang out from all sides of the Chamber. Monsieur de Combefot, whose smiling attention had not waned for an instant, even cried out, “ Long live the Emperor !” but his exclamation was lost amid the hubbub ; however, Colonel Jobelin received almost an ovation as he stood at the edge of the gallery, and clapped his hands, in spite of the regulation to the contrary. Everybody began to enthusiastically congratulate everybody else. The period of restraint was over, and from row to row kindly greetings were exchanged, while a crowd of friends thronged round the deputy who had been speaking and energetically shook both his hands.

Then, after a time, above the general confusion, there was heard the cry of “ Deliberate ! deliberate !”

The president had been standing at his desk, apparently expecting this cry. When he heard it, he rang his bell, and as the Chamber suddenly subsided into respectful attention again, he said :

"Gentlemen, a large number of members request that we should at once deliberate upon this measure."

"Yes, yes," the whole Chamber cried with one voice.

But there was no deliberation at all. They proceeded to vote at once. The two clauses of the measure which were successively put to the Chamber were immediately passed by the deputies rising in their places. The president had scarcely finished reading each clause before all the members rose in a mass with much stamping of feet, as though they were all under the influence of some thrill of enthusiasm. Then the urn-shaped ballot-boxes were passed round, and the various ushers, threading their way through the rows of seats, received the votes in the zinc receptacles. The four hundred thousand francs were voted unanimously by the two hundred and thirty-nine members present.

"There, that's nicely over," said Monsieur Béjuin, and he began to laugh as though he had said something witty.

"It's past three o'clock ; I must be off," exclaimed Monsieur La Rouquette, passing in front of Monsieur Kahn.

The Chamber was emptying. The deputies were all making for the doors and they seemed to vanish through the walls. The next business consisted of matters of merely local interest, and soon there was no one left on the benches except a few willing deputies who had probably nothing to do elsewhere, and these continued their interrupted naps or resumed their conversation at the point where it had been broken off, the sitting concluding, as it had commenced, in the midst of a listless indifference. Gradually, too, the confused buzzing murmur subsided as though the Corps Législatif had dropped off to sleep in some quiet corner of Paris.

"You had better try and get a word with Delestang as you go away," said Monsieur Kahn to Monsieur Béjuin. "He came with Rougon, and he must know something."

"Yes, you are right," replied Monsieur Béjuin, gazing at the councillor who was sitting at Rougon's left hand ; "I never know them in those confounded uniforms."

"I shall stop here so as to have a chance of getting hold of our great man," added Monsieur Kahn. "It is absolutely necessary that we should get some information."

The president was putting to the vote an interminable string of bills, which were passed by the members rising in their places. The deputies rose and then sat down again quite

mechanically, without ceasing to converse and even without ceasing to sleep. The proceedings were becoming so monotonously wearisome that most of the spectators whom curiosity had brought into the gallery took their departure. It was only Rougon's friends who remained. They were still hoping that he would speak.

Suddenly, a deputy, whose correctly trimmed whiskers bespoke the provincial advocate, rose up. This at once stopped the monotonous mechanism of the voting. Surprise and curiosity made all the members turn round and look at the member who had risen.

"Gentlemen," said the deputy, standing in his place, "I ask permission to explain the reasons which have compelled me to separate myself, to my great regret, from the majority of the Committee."

His voice was so shrill and comical that the fair Clorinde was obliged to stifle a laugh with her hands. Below in the Chamber itself, the astonishment of the deputies was increasing. What was the man talking about? By dint of inquiries, they ascertained that the president had just brought before the Chamber a bill to authorize the department of the Pyrénées-Orientales to borrow a sum of two hundred and fifty thousand francs wherewith to build a Palace of Justice at Perpignan. The speaker, who was a general councillor of the department, was opposing the bill. The matter seemed likely to be interesting and the deputies began to listen.

The member with the correctly-trimmed whiskers, however, spoke with great circumspection. He used the most guarded language, and referred with the greatest respect to all the authorities; but the expenses of the department, he said, were very heavy, and he dwelt at length upon the financial situation of the Pyrénées-Orientales. He did not think that the necessity for a new Palace of Justice had been satisfactorily demonstrated. He continued to speak in this strain for a quarter-of-an-hour, and when he sat down he seemed quite overcome with emotion. Then Rougon again slowly drooped his eyelids which he had temporarily raised.

Then the introducer of the bill got up. He was a little animated old man who spoke in clear incisive tones like one who is sure of his ground. He began with a complimentary reference to his honourable colleague, with whom he regretted to find himself in disagreement. But really, he went on to say, the

department of the Pyrénées-Orientales was not nearly so heavily burdened as had been alleged, and he brought forward fresh figures which showed the financial position of the department in an entirely different light. The absolute necessity, he continued, for a new Palace of Justice could not be denied. Then he entered into details. The old Palace, he said, was situated in such a densely populated neighbourhood that the noise of the streets prevented the judges from hearing the counsel. Then it was too small, too ; and when there happened, for instance when the Assizes were being held, to be a large number of witnesses in attendance, they were obliged to remain on the landing of the stair-case, which caused a serious and dangerous obstruction. The speaker concluded by bringing forward as an irresistible argument the fact that the measure had been introduced at the instigation of the Minister of Justice himself.

Rougon was sitting quite still, his hands lying clasped upon his legs and his head leaning back against the mahogany desk. When the discussion began his shoulders seemed to sink down lower than before, but when the first speaker seemed to be on the point of rising to reply, he raised his big frame, without actually getting on to his feet, and said in a thick voice :

“The honourable member who reported upon this measure forgot to mention that it has also received the approval of the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Finance.”

Then he let himself drop down again and reassumed his attitude of a drowsing bull. A slight murmur ran through the Chamber, and the deputy who had risen to reply sat down again with a low bow. The bill was passed, and such of the deputies as had shown any interest in the debate once more assumed an expression of indifference.

Rougon had spoken. From one section of the gallery to another Colonel Jobelin exchanged a glance with the Charbonnels, while Madame Correur made ready to leave her place, just as she would have quitted her box at the theatre before the fall of the curtain, if the hero of the play had delivered his last speech. Monsieur d'Escorailles and Madame Bouchard had already taken their departure. Clorinde stood up by the velvet-covered balustrade, and her majestic figure stood out conspicuously as she slowly wrapped her lace shawl round her, glancing round the Chamber as she did so. The rain was no longer beating down upon the window, but the sky

still remained gloomy and overcast. The mahogany desks looked black in the sombre light, and a vapoury mist streamed over the seats, which the bald heads of some of the deputies lighted up here and there with patches of white. Beneath the vague pallor of the allegorical figures, the black shapes of the president and the clerks and ushers, all ranged in line, showed like the stiff flat forms of a shadow-pantomime. The whole Chamber was wrapt in a blurring gloom.

“Oh, come along !” exclaimed Clorinde, pushing her mother out of the gallery ; “it is enough to kill one in here !”

She quite startled the drowsy ushers in the corridor by the strange fashion in which she had twisted her shawl round her hips.

When they got down-stairs into the hall the ladies met Colonel Jobelin and Madame Correur.

“We are waiting for him here,” said the colonel. “Perhaps he will come out this way. But any way, I have signalled to Kahn and Béjuin to come and give me some information.”

Madame Correur stepped up to the Countess Balbi.

“Ah ! it would be a great misfortune,” she said in disconsolate tones, without attempting to explain her meaning.

The colonel raised his eyes to heaven.

“The country has need of men like Rougon,” he said after a short pause. “The Emperor would make a great mistake.”

Then there was another pause in the conversation. Clorinde tried to pop her head into the “Salle des Pas Perdus,” but an usher promptly closed the door. Then she came back to her mother, who was standing silent in her black veil.

“What a bore it is having to wait like this !” she said.

Some soldiers now made their appearance, and the colonel announced that the sitting was over. The Charbonnels came into sight at the top of the staircase, and they carefully made their way down, one after the other, clinging hold of the balustrade. When Monsieur Charbonnel saw the colonel he called out to him :

“He didn’t say much, but he has completely shut their mouths for them !”

“He hadn’t a proper chance,” the colonel replied when Monsieur Charbonnel got up to him, “otherwise you would have heard something fine. He wants warming up.”

The soldiers had formed a double line from the Chamber to the gallery leading to the president’s mansion. Then a

procession made its appearance and the drummers beat a salute. At the head walked two ushers, dressed in black, carrying cocked hats under their arms, having chains about their necks, and wearing swords with steel hilts at their sides. Then came the president, escorted by two officers. The clerks of the Chamber and the president's secretary followed next. As the president passed the fair Clorinde he smiled at her, notwithstanding the pomp of his procession.

"Ah, you are there!" cried Monsieur Kahn, running up breathlessly.

Though the public were at that time excluded from the "Salle des Pas Perdus," he took them all into it and conducted them to one of the large glass door which opened upon the garden. He seemed very much put out.

"I have missed him again!" he cried. "He slipped out into the Rue de Bourgogne while I was waiting for him in the Général Foy gallery. But that really makes no difference; we shall get to know everything all the same. I have sent Béjuin off after Delestang."

They waited for another ten minutes. The deputies were all coming away with careless unconcerned expressions, and some of them lingered to light their cigars. Others were standing in little groups, laughing and shaking hands. Madame Correur had stepped aside to examine the "Laocoon;" and while the Charbonnels bent their necks back to look at a sea-gull which a whimsical artist had painted on the edge of a fresco, as though it were flying out of the picture, the fair Clorinde, standing in front of the great bronze Minerva, was examining the arms and throat of the gigantic goddess with an air of interest. In the recess of the glass door Colonel Jobelin and Monsieur Kahn were carrying on an animated conversation in low tones.

"Ah, there's Béjuin!" exclaimed the latter.

They all pressed closely together with an expression of anxiety. Monsieur Béjuin was breathing heavily.

"Well?" they asked him.

"Well! the resignation has been accepted, and Rougon retires!"

This was a crushing blow. There was an interval of painful silence. Clorinde, who was finding an occupation for her impatient fingers by knotting a corner of her shawl, now caught sight of pretty Madame Bouchard walking slowly along, at the end of the garden, holding Monsieur d'Escorailles' arm and leaning

her head slightly over his shoulder. They had come down before the others and had taken advantage of an open door; and they were now airing their tenderness for each other under the lace-work of fresh young leaves, in the quiet walks which were usually set apart for serious meditations. Clorinde beckoned to them.

“The great man has retired!” she said to the smiling young woman.

Madame Bouchard abruptly dropped her cavalier’s arm, and her face turned pale and grave, while Monsieur Kahn, surrounded by Rougon’s disconsolate and alarmed friends, raised his arms in a despairing manner to heaven, without being able to find a word to say.

CHAPTER II.

IN the next morning's "Moniteur" Rougon's resignation was announced. It was stated that he had resigned for "reasons of health." After he had breakfasted he went down to the Council of State, wishing to put everything in order for his successor. He was sitting in the large room hung with crimson and gold which was set apart for the president, in front of a rosewood writing-table, emptying the drawers and classifying the papers, which he tied up in bundles with pieces of pink tape.

He rang the bell and an usher entered the room, a splendidly built man who had formerly served in the cavalry.

"Bring me a lighted candle," said Rougon.

Then as the usher was leaving the room after placing upon the desk one of the small tapers off the mantel-piece, Rougon called him back.

"Don't admit anyone, Merle," he said; "no one at all, you understand?"

"No, Monsieur le Président," replied the usher, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

A faint smile played over Rougon's face. He turned towards Delestang, who was standing up at the other end of the room carefully examining the contents of several pasteboard boxes.

"Our friend Merle hasn't read the 'Moniteur' this morning," he said.

Delestang merely shook his head, not being able to think of any suitable reply. He had a magnificent head, very bald, indeed, but bald after that precocious fashion which is rather pleasing to women. His bare skull inordinately increased the size of his brow and gave him an expression of vast intelligence. His florid and somewhat squarely cut face, perfectly destitute of beard, recalled these perfect, pensive countenances which imaginative painters are wont to confer upon great statesmen.

"Merle is extremely devoted to you," he remarked after a pause.

Then he bent his head over the pasteboard boxes which he was

examining. Rougon crumpled up a handful of papers and after lighting them at the taper threw them into a large bronze vase which stood on the edge of his table. He watched them burn away.

"Don't touch the boxes at the bottom, Delestang," he said ; "there are papers in them that I must examine myself."

Then they both went on with their respective occupations in silence for another quarter of an hour. It was a very fine day and the sun streamed in through the three large windows which looked upon the quay. Through one of them, which was half opened, little puffs of fresh air from the Seine were wafted in, stirring every now and then the fringe of the silk curtains, and rustling the crumpled pieces of paper which lay about upon the floor.

"Just look at this," said Delestang, handing Rougon a letter which he had just found.

Rougon read it and then quietly lighted it at the taper. It was a letter on a delicate matter. The two men kept up a disjointed conversation, breaking off every few moments and burying their faces in the piles of old papers. Rougon thanked Delestang for having come to help him. He was the only person whom he felt that he could trust to assist him in this task of washing the dirty linen of his five years' presidency. They had been friends together in the Legislative Assembly, where they had sat side by side upon the same bench. It was there that Rougon had first taken a genuine fancy to this splendid-looking man, when he found that he was so delightfully foolish and shallow and proud. He often used to say with an air of conviction that "that precious Delestang will go a long way." He did what he could to push him on, gratitude securing him his devotion, and he made use of him as a kind of desk in which he locked up what he could not carry about with him.

"How foolish of me to have kept all these papers !" Rougon murmured, as he opened a fresh drawer that was crammed quite full.

"Here is a letter from a lady !" said Delestang winking.

Rougon broke out into a loud laugh and his huge chest shook. He took the letter with a protest. As soon as his eyes had glanced over the first lines, he cried :

"It is little Escorailles who has let this drop here ! They are pretty things those letters. With three lines from a woman, a fellow may go a long way !"

Then, as he burnt the letter, he added :

“ Be on your guard against women, Delestang ! ”

Delestang bent down his head again. He was perpetually the victim of some hazardous passion. In 1851 he had all but ruined his political future. At that time he was madly infatuated with the wife of a socialist deputy, and to curry favour with her husband he more frequently than not voted with the opposition against the Élysée. The events of the second of December consequently filled him with terrible alarm, and he shut himself up for a couple of days in a state of distraction, trembling with fear lest at any moment he should be arrested. Rougon had helped him out of his awkward position, advising him not to stand at the ensuing elections and taking him down to the Élysée, where he succeeded in getting him a place in the Council of State. Delestang, who was the son of a wine-merchant at Bercy, was a retired attorney and the owner of a model farm near Sainte-Menehould. He was worth several millions of francs and lived in a very handsome house in the Rue du Colisée.

“ Yes, beware of women,” Rougon repeated, making a pause after each word to cast a glance at his papers. “ When a woman does not put a crown upon your head she slips a halter round your neck. At our age, a man’s heart wants as carefully looking after as his stomach.”

At this moment a loud noise was heard in the ante-chamber, and Merle’s voice could be recognised refusing admission to some visitor. A little man suddenly rushed into the room, exclaiming : “ I must really go and shake hands with my dear friend ! ”

“ Hallo ! is that you, Du Poizat ? ” exclaimed Rougon without rising from his seat.

Merle was making sweeping gesticulations to excuse himself, but his master told him to close the door. Then he quietly said to Du Poizat :

“ I thought you were at Bressuire. So you desert your sub-prefecture as easily as a cast-off mistress, eh ? ”

Du Poizat, who was a slightly made man with a mean-looking face and very white irregular teeth, shrugged his shoulders a little as he replied :

“ I arrived in Paris this morning on business, and I did not intend to come and see you till the evening, when I should have called upon you in the Rue Marbeuf and asked you to give me some dinner. But when I read the ‘ Moniteur— ’ ”

He pulled an easy-chair in front of the desk and boldly seated himself facing Rougon.

"Well now, what's been happening, eh ? I've come from the depths of the Deux-Sèvres. I have heard something over there, but I had no idea of this. Why didn't you write to me ?"

Rougon now in his turn shrugged his shoulders. It was evident that tidings of his disgrace had reached Du Poizat in the country, and that he had hastened up to Paris to see if he could not find out some way of securing stability for his own position. Rougon cast a keenly penetrating glance upon his visitor as he said :

"I should have written to you this evening. Send in your resignation, my good fellow."

"That is what I wanted to know about ; well, I will resign," replied Du Poizat quietly.

Then he rose up from his seat and began to whistle. As he slowly paced across the room he caught sight of Delestang kneeling on the carpet in the midst of a litter of portfolios. He went up to him and shook hands with him without making any remark. Then he took a cigar out of his pocket and lighted it at the candle.

"I may smoke here, I suppose, as you are removing ?" he said, sitting down again in the easy-chair. "It's good fun is removing!"

Rougon was absorbed in a bundle of papers which he was reading with deep attention. He sorted them very carefully, burning some and preserving others. Du Poizat, with his head lolling back, and puffing light clouds of smoke from between his lips, watched him. They had become acquainted with each other some months before the revolution of February. At that time they were both boarding with Madame Correur at the Hôtel Vanneau in the Rue Vanneau. Du Poizat found himself quite at home there, for he and Madame Correur had both been born at the same place, Coulonges, a little town in the district of Niort. His father, a bailiff, had sent him to study law in Paris, where he allowed him only a hundred francs a month, although he had amassed large sums by lending out money for short periods at a high rate of interest. The old man's wealth seemed, indeed, so inexplicably great to his country neighbours that it was said that he had discovered a large treasure in an old chest of drawers upon which he had dis-

trained. From the outset of the Bonapartist propaganda Rougon had availed himself of the services of this scrappy youth who made very short work of eating up his monthly hundred francs, and they were partners together in the most risky undertakings. Later on, when Rougon was desirous of entering the Legislative Assembly, Du Poizat worked energetically to secure his election for Deux-Sèvres. Then, after the Coup d'État, Rougon in his turn used all his influence on behalf of Du Poizat and succeeded in getting him appointed sub-prefect at Bressuire. The young man, who was then barely thirty years of age, had desired to return in triumph to his own neighbourhood, where he would be near his father, whose avarice had caused him to live a life of such painful distress ever since he had left college.

"And how is your father?" asked Rougon, without raising his eyes.

"Oh, much too well," answered Du Poizat bluntly. "He has sent his last remaining servant away because she ate three pounds of bread. Now he keeps a couple of loaded guns behind his door, and when I go to see him I have to hold a parley with him over the wall of the yard."

As he was talking, Du Poizat leaned forward and poked about with his fingers in the bronze vase, where some fragments of paper were lying only half-consumed. Rougon raised his head sharply as he caught sight of what he was doing. He had always felt a slight distrust of his old lieutenant, whose irregular white teeth resembled those of a young wolf. In the days when they had worked together he had always made a point of never allowing any compromising document to fall into his hands; and now, as he saw him trying to decipher the words that still remained legible, he threw a handful of blazing letters into the vase. Du Poizat perfectly understood why he did so, but he merely smiled and began to joke.

"It's a thorough cleaning you're going in for," he said.

Then he took up a large pair of scissors and began to use them as tongs. He re-lighted at the taper the letters which were burning out without being consumed, held in the air those papers which had been too tightly crumpled together to burn in the vase, and stirred up the flaming ashes as though he were stirring a blazing bowl of punch. The red-hot sparks danced about in the vase, and a cloud of bluish smoke rose up and gently curled away towards the open window. Every now and

then the candle flickered and then burnt brightly again with a straight tall flame.

"That candle of yours looks like a funeral-taper!" said Du Poizat with a grin. "Ah! it is really a burial, my poor friend, and that vase of yours is a funeral-pyre!"

Rougon was going to reply when a fresh commotion was heard in the ante-chamber. Merle could be heard a second time refusing admission. As the sound of the voices grew louder, Rougon exclaimed :

"Would you be good enough to go and see what it is, Delestang? If I show myself we shall be perfectly invaded."

Delestang cautiously opened the door and closed it after him. But he popped his head into the room almost immediately afterwards and said :

"It's Kahn who is here."

"Oh, very well!" replied Rougon; "let him come in; but no one else, mind!"

Then he called to Merle and reiterated his orders.

"I beg your pardon, my dear friend," he said, turning to Kahn, as soon as the usher had left the room; "but I am really so very busy. Sit down beside Du Poizat and keep quite still or I shall be obliged to turn you both out of the room."

The deputy did not appear in the least offended by Rougon's blunt reception of him. He was quite accustomed to his ways. He took an easy-chair and sat down by the side of Du Poizat, who was just lighting a second cigar.

"It is getting very warm," he said with a panting breath. "I have just been to the Rue Marbeuf; I expected to find you at home."

Rougon made no reply and there was an interval of silence. He crumpled up some papers and threw them into a basket which he had placed by his side.

"I want to talk to you," resumed Monsieur Kahn.

"Talk away!" said Rougon; "I am listening to you."

The deputy now seemed suddenly to become aware of the disordered condition of the room.

"What are you doing?" he asked with an admirably feigned expression of surprise. "Are you changing your room?"

The tone of his voice was so sincere that Delestang took the trouble to leave what he was doing and hand the "Moniteur" to him.

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" he cried, as soon as he had read the paragraph that was pointed out to him. "I thought the matter

was satisfactorily arranged yesterday evening. This comes upon me quite like a thunder-bolt. My dear friend—”

He got up from his chair and pressed Rougon's hands. The latter looked at him in silence, while two deep scoffing creases became apparent on his heavy face at the edges of his lips. As Du Poizat seemed quite unexcited, he suspected that he and Kahn had already met earlier in the morning, and he was the more confirmed in this opinion upon noticing that the latter had shown no surprise at seeing the sub-prefect. He surmised that the one of them had come to the Council of State while the other hastened to the Rue Marbeuf, so that they might be sure to find him at the one place or the other.

“Well, there is something you said you wanted to say to me,” said Rougon quite unconcernedly. “What is it?”

“Oh, I won't trouble you about that now, my dear friend!” exclaimed the deputy. “You have got quite sufficient to worry you as it is. I should be very sorry to come and bother you with my own troubles at a time like this.”

“Oh, it will be no bother, I can assure you. Speak away.”

“Well, then, I wanted to speak to you about that affair of mine, that confounded grant. I am very glad that Du Poizat is here, as he may be able to give us information upon certain points.”

Then he explained at great length the exact situation which the matter had reached. It was a scheme for a railway from Niort to Angers, upon which he had been engaged for the last three years. The projected line would pass through Bressuire, where he possessed some blast-furnaces, of which it would largely increase the value. At the present time there were great difficulties in the way of transport and the business was consequently in a languishing condition. Monsieur Kahn had some hopes, too, that he would be able to get some very profitable pickings out of the affair, and so he exerted all his energy endavouring to obtain the grant. Rougon supported him with all his influence, and the grant was just on the point of being granted, when Monsieur de Marsy, the Minister of the Interior, vexed at having no share in the matter which he guessed would afford an opportunity for some jobbery, and being, at the same time, very desirous of doing anything that would annoy Rougon, used all his authority to oppose the scheme. With that audacity of his which made him such a terrible opponent, he had even just persuaded

the Minister of Public Works to offer the grant to the Western Railway Company, and he caused it to be generally circulated that this company alone could successfully carry out a branch line for the satisfactory working of which some solid guarantee was required. Monsieur Kahn seemed in great danger of being plundered of all the advantages he hoped to derive from constructing the line, and Rougon's fall appeared likely to involve him in ruin.

"I heard yesterday," he said, "that one of the company's engineers had been instructed to make a survey for the new line. Have you heard anything of the same kind, Du Poizat?"

"Yes, indeed," replied the sub-prefect. "The survey has already commenced. They are trying to avoid the detour which you were planning in order to make the line touch Bressuire, and to carry it straight along past Parthenay and Thouars."

A gesture of discouragement escaped the deputy.

"It is sheer persecution!" he exclaimed. "What harm could it do them to let the line pass my place? But I will protest and I will get up a petition against their plan. I will go back with you to Bressuire."

"No, no; you had better not wait for me," said Du Poizat with a smile. "It seems that I have got to resign."

Monsieur Kahn fell back in his chair, as though he were quite overcome by a final catastrophe. He rubbed his beard with both his hands and looked at Rougon with an air of supplication. The latter had given over examining his papers, and was leaning on his elbows and listening.

"I suppose," he said somewhat roughly, "you want my advice, don't you? Well then, my good friends, just keep quiet and try to keep things as they are until we get the upper hand. Du Poizat is going to resign, because, if he didn't, he would be dismissed within a fortnight. As for you, Kahn, you had better write to the Emperor and use all available means to try and prevent the grant being obtained by the Western Railway Company. You won't get it for yourself, but as long as it is not given to any one else, there is a chance of your winning it later on."

Then, as the two men jerked their heads, he continued roughly:

"Well, that's all I can do for you. I have been thrown down and you must give me time to pick myself up again. You don't see me going about with a woe-begone face, do you? Well, I

should be much obliged to you if you wouldn't look as though you were attending my funeral. For my own part, I am quite delighted at retiring into private life again. I shall be able at last to take a little rest."

He breathed a deep sigh and crossed his arms as he began to rock his huge frame backwards and forwards. Monsieur Kahn said nothing more about his scheme, and affected the careless air of Du Poizat and tried to appear perfectly indifferent. Delestang had opened some more pasteboard boxes and worked away so quietly behind the chairs, that the slight rustling sound he made every now and then might have been attributed to a troop of mice flitting across the papers. The stream of sunlight was travelling across the crimson carpet and lighting up a corner of the writing-table, paling the flame of the candle which was still burning there.

A friendly conversation sprang up amongst the men. Rougon, who had again begun to tie up bundles of papers, declared that he was really not cut out for politics, and smiled good-naturedly as his heavy eyelids drooped, as though with weariness, over his glistening eyes. He would have liked, he said, to have a large estate to cultivate, great fields which he could dig up at his pleasure, and flocks of animals, horses, cattle, sheep and dogs, of which he should be absolute monarch. He told them that in former days, when he was only a country lawyer at Plassans, his great pleasure consisted in setting off in a blouse on a hunting expedition of several days through the ravines of La Seille, shooting eagles. He said that he was a peasant; his grandfather had dug the soil. Then he assumed the air of a man disgusted with the world. Power had grown wearisome to him, and he said that he should go and spend the summer in the country. He declared that he had never felt so light-hearted as he did this morning, and he gave a mighty shrug of his strong shoulders, as though he had just thrown off some heavy burden.

"How much did you get here as President?" asked Monsieur Kahn; "eighty thousand francs?"

Rougon nodded assent.

"And now you'll only have your thirty thousand as a senator."

Rougon exclaimed that that would not affect him at all. He could live upon next to nothing, and he indulged himself in no vices, he said, which was perfectly true. He was neither a gambler nor a glutton nor a loose liver. His whole ambition, he

declared, was to be his own master. Then he returned again to his idea of a farm, where he would be king of all sorts of animals. His ideal life was to wield a whip and be paramount ; to be the master, to be chief both in intelligence and power. Gradually he grew animated and he talked of animals as though they had been men, declaring that the mob liked to be driven, and that shepherds directed their flocks by pelting them with stones. His face seemed transfigured, and his thick lips were puffed out with scorn, while his whole expression seemed to breathe out strength and power. He brandished a bundle of papers about in his clenched fist, appearing every now and then as though he were going to throw them at the heads of Monsieur Kahn and Du Poizat, who watched this sudden outburst of excitement with uneasy anxiety.

"The Emperor has behaved very badly," muttered Du Poizat.

Then Rougon all at once grew quite calm again. His face turned loomy and his body seemed to grow flabby and obese. He began to sound the Emperor's praises in an exaggerated fashion. He was a man of mighty intelligence, he declared, and had a mind of astonishing depth. Du Poizat and Kahn exchanged a meaning look. Rougon waxed still more lavish of his praises, and, in speaking of his devotion to his master, said with great humility that he had always been proud of being a mere instrument in the hands of Napoleon III. He talked on in this strain till he made Du Poizat, who was of a somewhat irritable nature, quite impatient, and they began to wrangle. Du Poizat spoke with considerable bitterness of all that Rougon and he had done for the Empire between 1848 and 1851, when they were lodging with Madame Correur in a condition of semi-starvation. He referred to the terrible days, especially those of the first year, which they spent in splashing through the mud of Paris, recruiting partisans for the Emperor's cause. Wasn't it Rougon, he asked, who on the morning of the second of December had taken possession of the Palais Bourbon at the head of a regiment of the line ? That was a game at which men staked their lives. And now to-day he was being sacrificed and made the victim of a court intrigue. Rougon, however, protested against this assertion. He was not being sacrificed, he declared ; he was resigning for private reasons. And as Du Poizat, now fully launched in a stream of declamation, began to call the folks of the Tuileries a set of "pigs," he ended by reducing him

to silence by bringing his fist down upon his rose-wood writing-table with a force which made it creak.

“This is all nonsense!” he said.

“You are, indeed, going a little too far,” remarked Monsieur Kahn.

Delestang was standing up behind the chairs looking very pale. He opened the door gently to see if anyone was listening, but there was no one in the ante-chamber but Merle, whose back was turned with an air of great discretion. Rougon’s observation had made Du Poizat blush, and he cooled down quickly and chewed his cigar in silent displeasure.

“There is no doubt that the Emperor is surrounded by injudicious advisers,” Rougon resumed after a pause. “I ventured to tell him as much, and he smiled. He even condescended to speak jokingly about it, and told me that my own surroundings were no better than his own.”

Du Poizat and Kahn laughed in a constrained fashion. They thought the reply a very good one.

“But,” continued Rougon in meaning tones, “I repeat that I am retiring of my own free will. If anyone questions you, who are my friends, on the matter, you can say that yesterday evening I was quite at liberty to withdraw my resignation. You can contradict, too, the gossiping stories which are being circulated about Rodriguez’s affair, out of which people seem to be making a perfect romance. On this subject I was obliged to disagree with the majority of the Council of State, and there has certainly been a deal of disagreement on this question which has hastened my retirement. But I had weightier and earlier reasons than that. For a long time past I have made up my mind to resign the high position which I owe to the Emperor’s kindness.”

He accompanied this speech with the gesticulating movement of his right hand in which he constantly indulged when he was addressing the Chamber. He evidently intended what he was saying to be made public. Monsieur Kahn and Du Poizat, who knew very well the kind of man they had to deal with, tried all kinds of stratagems to get at the real truth. They felt quite sure that the great man, as they familiarly called him between themselves, had got some formidable scheme in his head. They turned the conversation on to general politics. Rougon began to scoff at the parliamentary system, which he called “the dung-hill of mediocrities.” The Chamber, he declared, enjoyed

quite an absurd amount of liberty, and indulged in far too much talk. France required governing, he said, by a suitably-devised machine, with the Emperor at the head, and the great state-bodies, reduced to the position of mere working gear, below. He laughed, and his huge chest heaved, as he indulged in exaggerated theories, and manifested a scornful contempt for the imbeciles who demanded powerful rule.

“But,” interposed Monsieur Kahn, “with the Emperor at the top, and everybody else at the bottom, matters would not be very pleasant for anyone except the Emperor.”

“Anyone who doesn’t like it can take himself off,” Rougon replied quietly.

He smiled, and then added :

“And when he thinks it would suit him to come back, he can do so.”

Then there was a long interval of silence. Monsieur Kahn began contentedly to stroke his fringe of beard. He had found out what he wanted to know. He had guessed correctly at the Chamber on the previous evening when he had insinuated that Rougon, finding his influence at the Tuilleries seriously shaken, had taken time by the forelock and resigned. Rodriguez’s business had afforded him a splendid opportunity of honourably retiring.

“And what are people saying?” Rougon asked at last, to break the silence.

“Well, I’ve only just got here,” said Du Poizat, “but a little while ago I heard a gentleman who wore a decoration declaring in a café that he strongly approved of your retirement.”

“Béjuin was very much affected about it yesterday,” added Monsieur Kahn. “Béjuin is much attached to you. He’s rather slow, but he’s very genuine. Little La Rouquette, too, spoke very nicely, and referred to you in the kindest terms.”

Other names were mentioned as the conversation continued. Rougon asked direct questions, without showing the least sign of embarrassment, and extracted a complete account from the deputy, who complacently retailed to him an exact description of the attitude of the Corps Législatif towards him.

“This afternoon,” interrupted Du Poizat, who was feeling somewhat annoyed at having no information to impart, “I will take a ramble through Paris, and to-morrow morning, as soon as I am out of bed, I will come and tell you all I have heard.”

"By the way," cried Monsieur Kahn, with a laugh, "I forgot to tell you about De Combelot. I never saw a man in greater embarrassment."

He stopped short on seeing Rougon glance warningly towards Delestang, who with his back turned towards them, was at this moment standing upon a chair removing an accumulation of newspapers which had been stored away upon the top of a bookcase. Monsieur de Combelot had married one of Delestang's sisters. Delestang himself, since Rougon had fallen into disfavour, had felt a little down-hearted on account of his relationship with a chamberlain, and so wishing to affect unconcern, he turned round and said, with a smile :

"Why don't you go on? Combelot is an ass. I'm quite willing to allow that."

This unreserved condemnation of a brother-in-law afforded the gentlemen present much amusement, and Delestang, seeing his success, continued his attack upon him even to the extent of falling foul of his beard, that famous black beard which had such a reputation amongst the ladies. Then, as he threw down a bundle of newspapers on to the floor, he said abruptly :

"What is a source of sorrow to some is a source of joy to others."

This truism led to Monsieur de Marsy's name being introduced into the conversation. Rougon bent his head down, and absorbed himself in a searching examination of a portfolio, and left his friends to ease their minds. They spoke of Marsy with all the hostility of politicians attacking an adversary. They revelled in the strongest language, launching all kinds of abominable accusations against him, and so grossly exaggerating stories with a foundation of truth in them, that they became mere lies. Du Poizat, who had known Marsy in former days, before the Empire, declared that he was kept at that time by his mistress, a baroness whose diamonds he had devoured in three months. Monsieur Kahn asserted that there was not a single shady affair started in any part of Paris without Marsy having a hand in it. They encouraged each other in accusations of this kind, and went on from worse to worse. Marsy had received a bribe of fifteen hundred thousand francs; he had offered only the previous month a furnished house to little Florence of the Bouffes Theatre, a little trifle for which he had paid six hundred thousand francs, his share of the profits of a speculation in Morocco railway stock. Finally, not a week ago,

the grand scheme for constructing canals in Egypt, which had been got up by tools of his, so they declared, had scandalously collapsed, the shareholders discovering that not a single shovelful of earth had been turned, although they had been paying in money for a couple of years previously. Then they fell foul of Marsy's physical appearance, tried to depreciate his handsome looks, spoke of old complaints which would, sooner or later, play him nasty tricks, and even attacked the collection of pictures which he had got together.

"He is a brigand disguised as a vaudevillist," Du Poizat ended by exclaiming.

Rougon slowly raised his head. He looked at the two men with his big eyes.

"You are getting along pretty well," he said. "Marsy manages his affairs in his own way, as you manage yours in your way. We don't get on very well together, and if ever I get a chance of crushing him, I shall avail myself of it without hesitation. But all that you have been saying doesn't prevent Marsy being a very clever fellow, and, if ever the whim takes him, he will only make a single mouthful of the pair of you, I warn you of it."

Then he got up from his seat, feeling tired of sitting, and stretched himself. He gave a great yawn, as he added :

"And he will do it all the more easily, my friends, now that I am no longer in a position to interfere in your behalf."

"Oh, you can lead Marsy a pretty dance if you like," said Du Poizat, with a slight smile. "You have some papers here which he would be glad to pay a big price for. See ! the papers in the Lardenois matter are there, that affair in which he played such a singular part. There is a very curious letter there from him which I recognise as one that I brought you myself at the time."

Rougon went up to the grate to throw the papers with which he had gradually filled the basket into the fire. There was no more room in the bronze vase.

"We must give a stunning blow, and not a mere scratch," he said, shrugging his shoulders disdainfully. "Every one has foolish letters in the possession of other people."

He then lighted the letter just spoken of at the candle, and seud it to set fire to the heap of papers in the grate. He remained squatting for a moment, watching the blazing documents. The thick official papers turned black, and twisted about

like sheets of lead; the letters and scraps of paper, scrawled over with miserable handwriting, burnt away with little tongues of bluish flame, while inside the grate, in the midst of a swarm of sparks, half-consumed fragments still remained quite legible.

At this moment the door was thrown widely open, and a laughing voice was heard saying:

“All right! I will excuse you, Merle. I belong to the house, and if you don’t let me come in this way, I will go round by the Council Chamber.”

It was Monsieur d’Escorailles, for whom Rougon had obtained an appointment as auditor to the Council of State some six months previously. On his arm hung the pretty Madame Bouchard, looking delightfully fresh in a bright spring toilette.

“Hallo!” exclaimed Rougon, “we’ve got the ladies here now.”

He did not immediately leave his place by the grate. He remained stooping down, grasping the shovel, with which he pressed down the blazing papers to guard against an accident. He raised his big face with a look of displeasure, but Monsieur d’Escorailles appeared in no way disconcerted. When he and the young woman had entered the doorway, they had ceased to smile, and assumed an expression more suited to the circumstances.

“My dear master,” said Escorailles, “I bring a friend of yours, who insists upon coming to express her sorrow. We have seen the ‘Moniteur’ this morning—”

“Oh, you have seen the ‘Moniteur,’ too,” muttered Rougon, getting up at last on to his feet.

Then he caught sight of someone whom he had not previously noticed.

“Ah, Monsieur Bouchard!” he exclaimed, blinking his eyes.

It was the husband, indeed. He had just entered the room behind his wife’s skirts, silent and dignified. Monsieur Bouchard was sixty years old; his hair was quite white, his eyes were dim, and his face was worn by his twenty-five years of official work. He did not say a single word. He took Rougon’s hand with an appearance of emotion, and gave it three vigorous shakes.

“It is really very kind of you all,” said Rougon, “to come and see me, but I don’t know where to put you. Come over

here, will you? Du Poizat, give Madame Bouchard your chair."

He turned round as he spoke, and saw Colonel Jobelin standing in front of him.

"What! are you here too, colonel?" he cried.

The door had been left open, and Merle had not been able to keep out the colonel, who had come up the staircase immediately behind the Bouchards. He was holding the hand of his son, a tall lad of fifteen, who was then a pupil at the Louis-le-Grand College.

"I wanted to bring Auguste to see you," he said. "It is misfortune that reveals true friends. Auguste, go and give your hand."

Rougon, however, had sprung towards the ante-chamber, crying out:

"Shut the door, Merle! What are you thinking about? We shall have all Paris in here directly!"

The usher showed his calm face, and replied:

"It's all because they caught sight of you, Monsieur le Président."

As he spoke, he was obliged to step back close to the wall, in order to allow the Charbonnels to pass. They came into the room abreast, but not arm-in-arm. They were out of breath, and seemed quite disconsolate and amazed; and they both began to speak at once.

"We have just seen the 'Moniteur!' What dreadful news! How distressed your poor mother will be! And what a sad position, too, it puts us in ourselves!"

More guileless than the others, the Charbonnels were going to enter upon their own small affairs at once, but Rougon stopped them, and made them be silent. He shot a bolt that was hidden beneath the lock on the door, and remarked that if any people wanted to come in now, they would have to break in. Then, observing that none of his visitors showed any signs of leaving, he resigned himself, and tried to finish his task in the midst of the nine people who were crowding his room. The whole place was now in a state of chaotic confusion with the clearing that was going on, and there was such a litter of portfolios and papers upon the floor that the colonel and Monsieur Bouchard, when they wanted to reach the recess of one of the windows, had to exercise the greatest care and circumspection to avoid trampling upon some important document.

All the chairs were covered with bundles of papers tied together with tape, excepting the one on which Madame Bouchard was now sitting. She was smiling at the gallant speeches of Du Poizat and Monsieur Kahn ; while Monsieur d'Escorailles, not being able to find a hassock, pushed a thick blue portfolio, stuffed with letters, under her feet. The drawers out of the desk, which had been pushed into a corner of the room, afforded the Charbonnels a temporary seat where they could recover their breath, while the youthful Auguste, delighted at finding himself in the bustle of a removal, poked about, and disappeared behind a mountain of pasteboard boxes, amid which Delestang had entrenched himself. As the latter threw down the newspapers from the top of the bookcase, he caused considerable dust, which made Madame Bouchard slightly cough.

"I don't advise you to stay here in the midst of all this dirt," said Rougon, now busily engaged in emptying the boxes which he had asked Deslestang to leave unexamined.

The young woman, however, quite rosy from her attack of coughing, assured him that she was very comfortable, and that the dust would not spoil her bonnet. Then all the visitors launched out into a stream of condolences. The Emperor, they declared, could care very little about the real interests of the country to allow himself to be influenced by men so unworthy of his confidence. France was suffering a great loss. But it was ever thus, they said ; a man of high intelligence always had all the mediocrities leagued against him.

"Governments have no gratitude," declared Monsieur Kahn.

"So much the worse for them," exclaimed the colonel ; "they strike themselves when they strike those who serve them."

However, Monsieur Kahn was desirous of having the last word on the subject, so he turned towards Rougon, and said :

"When a man like you falls, it is a subject for public mourning."

This phrase met with the approval of all the visitors.

"Yes, yes," they exclaimed, "for public mourning, indeed !"

Rougon raised his head upon hearing these undisguised eulogiums. His greyish cheeks flushed slightly, and his whole face was lighted up with a suppressed smile of satisfaction. He was as proud of his ability as a woman is of her beauty, and he liked to receive point-blank compliments. It was becoming evident, however, that his visitors were in each other's way.

They kept glancing at one another, resolving to sit one another out, being unwilling to say all they wanted in the presence of others. Now that the great man had fallen, they were anxious to know if he had done anything for them while he had the power. The colonel was the first to take an active step. He led Rougon, who readily followed him, with a portfolio under his arm, into the recess of one of the windows.

“Have you given me a thought?” he asked, with a pleasant smile.

“Yes, indeed. Your nomination as commander of the Legion of Honour was promised to me four days ago. But, of course, to-day it is impossible for me to promise anything with certainty. I confess to you that I am afraid that my friends will be made to suffer by my fall.”

The colonel's lips trembled with emotion. He stammered out that they must do what they could; then he turned suddenly round, and called out:

“Auguste!”

The lad was on his hands and knees underneath the desk, trying to decipher the titles upon the portfolios, and casting, at the same time, glittering glances at Madame Bouchard's little boots. He hastened up to his father.

“Here's this lad of mine,” resumed the colonel in low tones. “I shall have to find a berth for the young scamp one of these days. I am counting upon you to help me. I haven't made up my mind yet between the law and the public service. Give your good friend your hand, Auguste, so that he may recollect you.”

While this scene was going on, Madame Bouchard, who had begun impatiently to bite her gloves, had risen from her chair and had made her way to the window on the left, bidding Monsieur d'Escorailles with a look to follow her. Her husband was already there, leaning his two elbows upon the cross-bar and gazing out upon the view. The leaves of the tall chestnut trees of the Tuileries were languidly trembling in the warm sunshine, and the Seine could be seen rolling its blue waters, flecked with golden light, between the Pont Royal and the Pont de la Concorde.

Madame Bouchard suddenly turned round and exclaimed:

“Oh, Monsieur Rougon, come and look here!”

As Rougon hastily quitted the colonel to obey her, Du Poizat, who had followed the young woman, discreetly retired and joined Monsieur Kahn at the middle window.

"Do you see that barge loaded with bricks? It nearly foundered just now," said Madame Bouchard.

Rougon stayed complacently there in the sunshine till Monsieur d'Escorailles, upon a fresh look from Madame Bouchard, said to him :

"Monsieur Bouchard wants to send in his resignation. We have brought him here that you may try to dissuade him."

Monsieur Bouchard then explained that he could not endure injustice.

"Yes, Monsieur Rougon," he continued, "I began by being a copying-clerk in the office of the Minister of the Interior, and I reached the position of head clerk without being indebted to either favour or intrigue. I have been head clerk since 1847. Well, the position of secretary has been vacant five times, four times under the Republic and once under the Empire, without the Minister having once thought of me, who had hierarchical rights to the place. Now that you will be no longer there to fulfil the promise which you made me, I think I had better retire."

Rougon did what he could to soothe him. The place, he said, had not yet been bestowed upon any one else, and even if he did not get it this time, it would only be a chance lost, a chance which would certainly present itself again upon some future occasion. Then he grasped Madame Bouchard's hands and complimented her in a paternal fashion. The head-clerk's house had been the first thrown open to him, upon his arrival in Paris, and it was there that he had met the colonel, who was the head-clerk's cousin. Later on, when Monsieur Bouchard had inherited his father's property and had been smitten, at fifty-four years of age, with a sudden desire to get married, Rougon had acted as witness on behalf of Madame Bouchard, then Adèle Desvignes, a well brought up young lady, belonging to a respectable family at Rambouillet. The head-clerk had been anxious to marry a young lady from the provinces, because he made a point of having a steady wife. The fair and adorable little Adèle, with her innocent, though slightly dull, blue eyes, had already got to her third lover, though she had been married only four years.

"There, now, don't worry yourself," said Rougon, who was still holding her hands in his great fists. "You know, quite well, that I will do my best for you."

Then he took Monsieur d'Escorailles on one side, and told him

that he had written that morning to his father to let him know that he might feel quite easy. The young auditor might remain quietly in his place. The Escorailles family was one of the oldest in Plassans, where it enjoyed the utmost respect of the public ; and Rougon, who, in former days, had often dragged his worn-down boots past the house of the old marquis, took a pride in protecting and assisting the young man. The family retained an enthusiastic devotion for Henri V., though it allowed the young fellow to serve under the Empire. This was the inevitable consequence of the wickedness of the times.

At the middle window, which they had opened to obtain greater privacy for themselves, Monsieur Kahn and Du Poizat were talking together, while they gazed out upon the distant roofs of the Tuileries, which looked blue in the haze of the sunlight. They were carefully sounding each other, dropping a few words every now and then, followed by intervals of silence. Rougon, they agreed, was too hasty and impulsive. He ought not to have allowed himself to be irritated by this matter of Rodriguez's claim, a question which might have been easily settled. Then Monsieur Kahn murmured, gazing out blankly into the distance, and as though he were speaking to himself :

“One knows when one falls, but one never knows whether one will ever rise up again.”

Du Poizat pretended not to hear. After a long pause, he said :

“Oh ! he's a very clever fellow.”

Then the deputy abruptly turned round and began to speak to him very rapidly, looking him full in the face.

“Between ourselves,” he said, “I am afraid for him. He plays with fire. We are his friends, of course, and there can be no thought of our abandoning him. But I must say that he has thought very little about us in this matter. Take my own case, for example. I have matters of enormous importance upon my hands, and he has completely compromised them by this sudden freak of his. He would have no right to complain—would he, now?—if I were to go and knock at somebody else's door ; for, you know, it is not I alone who suffer, there are all the other people as well.”

“Yes, well, go and knock at some other door,” said Du Poizat, with a smile.

Then the deputy, in a sudden outburst of anger, let the truth escape him.

"But is it possible? This confounded fellow spoils you with everybody else. When one belongs to his clique, everyone else fights shy of you."

Then he calmed down as he sighed and looked out towards the Arc de Triomphe, of which the greyish mass could be seen rising out of the green expanse of the Champs Élysées.

"Well, well," he continued softly, "I'm as faithful as a dog myself."

During the last moment or two the colonel had been standing behind the two men.

"Fidelity is the road to honour," he said, in his military voice.

Du Poizat and Monsieur Kahn separated to make room for the colonel.

"Rougon is contracting a debt to us to-day," he continued. "Rougon no longer belongs to himself."

This remark met with the warmest approbation. It was certainly quite true that Rougon no longer belonged to himself. What was more, it was necessary that he should be distinctly told so, that he might know what it behoved him to do. The three men began to speak in whispers, making plans and fortifying each other with hope. Every now and then they turned round and cast a glance into the big room to see that no one monopolised the great man for too long a time.

The great man was now gathering up the portfolios, while he still continued to talk to Madame Bouchard. The Charbonnels were disputing in the corner where they had remained silent and ill at ease ever since they had arrived. They had twice attempted to get hold of Rougon, but had been anticipated by the colonel and the young woman. Now at last Monsieur Charbonnel pushed his wife towards him.

"This morning," she stammered, "we received a letter from your mother—"

He did not allow her to finish what she was going to say, but took her and her husband into the recess of the right-hand window, once more leaving his portfolios without showing any great impatience.

"We have received a letter from your mother," Madame Charbonnel repeated.

She was going to read the letter, but Rougon took it from her and glanced hastily over it. Charbonnel was a retired oil merchant from Plassans, and he and his wife were protected by

Madame Felicité, as Rougon's mother was called in her own little town. She had given them a letter of introduction to him upon the occasion of their presenting a petition to the Council of State. A cousin of theirs, Chevassu, a lawyer at Faverolles, the chief town of a neighbouring department, had died, leaving his fortune of five hundred thousand francs to the Sisters of the Holy Family. The Charbonnels, who had never expected to come into his fortune, having suddenly become his next heirs owing to the death of his brother, contested the will on the ground of undue influence, and as the Sisterhood petitioned the Council of State to authorise the payment of the bequest to them, Charbonnel and his wife had left their home at Plassans and had hastened to Paris and taken lodgings at the Hôtel du Périgord in the Rue Jacob so that they might be on the spot to look after their interests. The matter had been lingering on for the past six months.

"We are feeling extremely depressed," Madame Charbonnel sighed, while Rougon was reading the letter. "I myself was always against our beginning this action, but Monsieur Charbonnel said that with you on our side we should certainly get the money, as you had only to say a word to put the five hundred thousand francs into our pocket. Isn't that so, Monsieur Charbonnel?"

The retired oil merchant nodded his head with a hopeless air.

"And for such a sum as that," continued Madame Charbonnel, "it did really seem worth while disturbing our old way of life. And it has been nicely disturbed, indeed. Will you believe, Monsieur Rougon, that they actually refused to change our dirty towels at the hotel yesterday? We who at home have five chests full of linen!"

She went on bitterly railing at Paris, which she detested. They had come originally for a week. Then, as they had always hoped to be able to return home the following week, they had not thought it worth while sending for anything, and now, as their case was still unsettled, they remained doggedly on in their furnished lodgings, eating whatever it pleased the cook to send them, without clean linen and almost without clothes. They had not even a hair-brush, and Madame Charbonnel was obliged to make her toilette with a broken comb. Sometimes they sat down on their little trunk and cried from weariness and indignation.

"And the hotel is frequented by such queer characters!"

complained Monsieur Charbonnel, with a shocked expression. "A young man has the room next to ours, and the things we hear—"

Rougon was folding up the letter.

"My mother, he said, "gives you excellent advice in telling you to be patient. I can only suggest to you to take fresh courage. You seem, to me, to have a very good case, but now that I have resigned I dare not take upon myself to promise you anything."

"Then we will leave Paris to-morrow!" cried Madame Charbonnel, in an outburst of despair.

As soon as this cry had escaped from her lips, she turned very pale and her husband had to support her. They both remained speechless for a moment or two, looking at each other with trembling lips and feeling a great desire to burst into tears. They felt faint and dazed as though they had just seen the five hundred thousand francs dashed out of their hands.

"You have had to deal with a strong opponent," Rougon continued kindly. "Monseigneur Rochart, the Bishop of Faverolles, has himself come to Paris to support the claim of the Sisters of the Holy Family. If it had not been for his intervention, you would long ago have gained your cause. Unfortunately the clergy are now very powerful. However, I am leaving friends here behind me, and I hope to be able to bring some influence to bear in your favour, while I keep myself in the background. You have waited here so long that if you go away to-morrow—"

"We will remain, we will remain," Madame Charbonnel, hastily gasped out. "Ah, Monsieur Rougon, this inheritance will have cost us very dear!"

Rougon now hastened back to his papers. He cast a glance of satisfaction round the room, deriving consolation from the fact that there was now no one else to take him off into one of the window-recesses. They had all had their say. For a few minutes he devoted himself energetically to his task. He began to be bitterly jocose and avenged himself on his visitors for the bother they were causing him by making them the victims of his biting satire. For a quarter of an hour he was a perfect scourge for those friends of his to whose various stories he had just listened so complacently. His language was so cutting and he behaved so harshly to pretty Madame Bouchard that the young woman's eyes filled with tears, though she still continued

to smile. All the others laughed, for they were quite accustomed to Rougon's rough ways. They knew that their prospects were never better than when he was belabouring them in this way.

Just at this moment there was a gentle knock at the door.

"No, no!" cried Rougon to Delestang, who was going to see who was there; "don't open it! Am I never to be left at peace? My head is splitting already."

Then, as the knocking was continued with greater energy, he growled out between his teeth:

"Ah, if I were going to stay here, I would send that Merle about his business."

The knocking had now ceased, but a little door in a corner of the room was thrown back and gave entrance to a huge blue silk skirt, which came in backwards. This skirt, which was very bright and ornamented with bows of ribbon, remained stationary for a moment, half inside the room and half outside, without anything further being visible. Then a soft female voice was heard speaking outside.

"Monsieur Rougon!" cried the lady, at last showing her face.

It was Madame Correur, wearing a bonnet with a cluster of roses on it. Rougon, who had stepped angrily up to the door, clenching his fists, now bowed and grasped the hand of the new-comer.

"I was asking Merle how he liked being here," she said, casting a tender glance at the big lanky usher, who was standing smiling in front of her. "And you, Monsieur Rougon, are you satisfied with him?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," replied Rougon, pleasantly.

Merle's face still retained its sanctimonious smile, and he kept his eyes fixed upon Madame Correur's plump neck. The latter braced herself up to her full height and brought her curls over her forehead.

"I am glad to hear that," she continued. "When I get anyone a place, I am anxious that all parties should be satisfied. If you ever want any advice, you can come and see me any morning, you know, between eight and nine. Mind you keep steady, now."

Then she came inside the room, and said to Rougon:

"There are no servants so good as these old soldiers."

Then she took hold of him and made him cross the whole length of the room, leading him with short steps to the window

at the other end. There she scolded him for not having opened the door to her. If Merle had not allowed her to come in by the little door, she would have been still waiting outside. And it was absolutely necessary that she should see him, she said, for he really could not take himself off in this way without letting her know how her petitions were progressing. Then she drew from her pocket a little memorandum-book, very richly ornamented and bound in rose-coloured watered-silk.

“I did not see the ‘*Moniteur*’ till after breakfast,” she continued; “and then I took a cab at once. Tell me, now, how the matter of Madame Leture, the captain’s widow, who wants to have a tobacco shop, is getting on? I have promised her that she should have a definite answer next week. Then there’s the case of Herminie Billecoq, you remember, who used to be a pupil at Saint Denis. Her seducer, you know, an officer, has consented to marry her, if any charitable soul will give her the regular dowry. We thought about applying to the Empress. Then there are all those ladies, Madame Chardon, Madame Testanière and Madame Jalaguier, who have been waiting for months.”

Rougon quietly gave her the replies she sought, explained the various reasons for the delays that had taken place, and entered into most minute details about the different matters. But he gave her to understand that she must not reckon so much upon him in the future as she had done in the past. This threw her into great distress. It made her so happy, she said, to be able to be of service to anyone. What would become of all those ladies? Then she went on to speak of her own affairs, with which Rougon was fully acquainted. She told him once more that she was a Martineau, one of the Martineaus of Coulonges, a good family of Vendée, which could show an unbroken series, from father to son, of seven successive notaries. She never clearly explained how she came to bear the name of Correur. When she was twenty-four years old, she had eloped with a young butcher, the outcome of meeting him under a shed throughout the summer. For six months, her father had suffered the greatest distress from this disgraceful scandal, about which the neighbourhood still gossiped. Ever since then she had been living in Paris, quite dead to her family. She had written fully a dozen times to her brother, who was now at the head of the family practice, but without succeeding in getting any reply from him. His silence, she said, was due

to her sister-in-law, a woman who "carried on with priests, and led that imbecile brother of hers by the nose." One of her most cherished ambitions was, as in Du Poizat's case, to return to her own neighbourhood as a well-to-do and honoured woman.

"I wrote again a week ago," she said: "but I have no doubt she throws my letters into the fire. However, if my brother should die, she would be obliged to let me go to the house, for they have no child, and I should have my own interests to look after. My brother is fifteen years older than I am, and I hear that he suffers from gout."

Then she suddenly changed her tone, and continued :

"However, don't let us bother about all that now. It is for you that we must use all our energies at present, Eugène. We will do our best, you shall see that. It is necessary that you should be everything, in order that we may be something. You remember '51, don't you, eh ?"

Rougon smiled, and as Madame Correur pressed his hands with a maternal air, he bent down and whispered into her ear :

"If you see Gilquin, tell him to be prudent. To think that only the other week, when he got himself locked up, he took it into his head to give my name, so that I might bail him out."

Madame Correur promised to speak to Gilquin, who was one of her old tenants at the time when Rougon had lodged at the Hôtel Vanneau, a very useful fellow on certain occasions, but apt to be extremely compromising.

"I have a cab down below, and so now I'll be off," she said aloud with a smile, as she stepped into the middle of the room.

She lingered, however, for a few minutes longer, hoping to get the others to take their departure at the same time. In her desire to effect this, she offered to take one of them with her in her cab. The colonel accepted her offer, and it was settled that the youthful Auguste should sit outside with the driver. Then a general hand-shaking commenced. Rougon took up his position by the door, which was thrown wide open. As his visitors passed out in front of him, each gave expression to a last remark of sympathy and condolence. Monsieur Kahn, Du Poizat, and the colonel stretched out their necks and whispered a word or two into his ear, begging him not to forget them. The Charbonnels had already reached the first step of the staircase, and Madame Correur was chatting

with Merle at the far end of the ante-chamber, while Madame Bouchard, for whom her husband and Monsieur d'Escorailles were waiting a few paces away, still lingered smilingly before Rougon, asking him at what time she could see him quite alone in the Rue Marbeuf, because she felt too stupid, she said, when he had visitors with him. But when the colonel heard her making this request, he suddenly darted back into the room, and then the others followed, there being a general return.

“We will all come and see you,” the colonel cried.

“You mustn’t go and hide yourself away from everyone,” several voices exclaimed.

Monsieur Kahn waved his hand to obtain silence. Then he made that famous observation of his :

“You don’t belong to yourself ; you belong to your friends, and to France.”

Then, at last, they all went away, and Rougon was able to close the door. He gave a great sigh of relief. Delestang, whom he had quite forgotten, now made his appearance from behind the heap of pasteboard boxes, under the shelter of which he had just finished classifying different papers, after the fashion of a conscientious friend. He was feeling a little proud of his work. He had been acting, while the others had been merely talking ; and so it was with genuine satisfaction that he received the thanks of the great man. It was only he, so the latter said, who could have rendered him this service ; he had an orderly mind, and a methodical manner of working which would carry him a long way. Rougon also made other flattering observations, without it being possible to know whether he was really serious or only jesting. Then, turning round, and glancing into the different corners, he said :

“There, I think we’ve finished everything now, thanks to you. There’s nothing to be done now, except to tell Merle to have these packets taken to my house.”

He called the usher, and pointed out to him his private papers. To all Rougon’s instructions, the usher replied :

“Yes, Monsieur le Président.”

“Don’t call me president any longer, you stupid,” Rougon at last cried in irritation, “I’m one no longer.”

Merle bowed, and took a step towards the door. Then he stopped and seemed to hesitate. Finally he came back, exclaiming :

“There is a lady on horseback down below who wants to see

you, sir. She laughed, and said that she would come up, horse and all, if the staircase were wide enough. She only wants, she says, to shake hands with you, sir."

Rougon clenched his fists, imagining that this was some joke, but Delestang, who had gone to look out of the window on the landing, hastened back, and exclaimed, with an expression of emotion :

" Mademoiselle Clorinde ! "

Then Rougon said that he would come downstairs ; and as he and Delestang took up their hats, he looked at his friend, and exclaimed, with a frown and an expression of suspicion, excited by the latter's emotion :

" Beware of women ! "

When he reached the door, he gave a last glance round the room. Through the three open windows the full light of day was streaming in, illuminating the open pasteboard boxes and the scattered drawers and the packets of papers, tied up and heaped together on the middle of the carpet. The room looked very big and very mournful. At the bottom of the grate there was nothing left of all the handfuls of burnt papers but a little heap of black ashes. As Rougon closed the door behind him, the candle, which had been left forgotten on the edge of the writing-table, burnt out, and cracked the cut-glass socket into pieces amid the silence of the empty room.

CHAPTER III.

ROUGON occasionally went to the Countess Balbi's for a few minutes at about four o'clock in the afternoon. He walked there in a neighbourly way, for she lived in a small house overlooking the avenue of the Champs Élysées and only a few yards from the Rue Marbeuf. She was seldom at home, and when by chance she did happen to be so, she was in bed and had to send excuses for not making her appearance. This, however, did not prevent the stair-case of the little house from being crowded with a throng of noisy visitors, nor the drawing-room doors from being perpetually on the swing. Her daughter Clorinde used to receive her friends in a gallery, something like an artist's studio, with great windows looking on to the avenue.

For nearly three months, Rougon, with his blunt distaste for female wiles, had responded very coldly to the advances of these ladies, who had got themselves introduced to him at a ball given by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. He met them everywhere, both of them smiling with the same winning smile ; the mother always keeping silent, while the daughter always talked loudly and looked him straight in the face. But he still went on avoiding them and drooped his eyes so as not to see them and refused the invitations which they sent to him. Then, as they still continued to press him hard and pursued him even to his own house, past which Clorinde used to ride ostentatiously, he made a series of inquiries before at last venturing to call on them.

At the Italian Legation the ladies were spoken of in very favourable terms. The Count Balbi had had a real existence, the countess still had highly placed relations at Turin, and the daughter, during the preceding year, had been on the point of marrying a petty German prince. But at the Duchess of Sanquirino's, where Rougon made his next inquiries, he heard quite a different story. There he was told that Clorinde had been born two years after the death of the Count, and a very

complicated history of the Balbis was related to him. The husband and wife had had a most adventurous existence, he was told : they had both spent dissolute lives ; they had been divorced in France, but had become reconciled to each other again in Italy, their subsequent cohabitation becoming a sort of concubinage, in consequence of their previous divorce.

A young attaché, who was thoroughly acquainted with what went on at the court of King Victor Emmanuel, was still more explicit. According to his account, whatever influence the countess still retained in Italy was due to an old connection with a very highly placed personage there, and he hinted that she would not have left Turin if it had not been for a terrible scandal into the details of which he could not enter. Rougon, whose interest in the matter was increasing with the extent of his inquiries, now went to the police authorities, but they could give him no precise information. Their entries relating to the two foreigners simply described them as women who kept up a great show without there being any proof of their being really in possession of a solid fortune. They asserted that they had property in Piedmont. As a matter of fact, there were sudden breaks in their life of luxury, during which they suddenly disappeared, only to reappear again shortly afterwards in fresh splendour. In brief, all that the police could tell him was that they really knew nothing about them and would prefer to know nothing. They associated with the best society, and their house was looked upon as a neutral ground, where Clorinde's eccentricities were tolerated and excused on account of her being a foreigner. Rougon at last made up his mind to go and see these ladies.

By the time he had made his third visit, the great man's curiosity in respect of them had still further increased. He was of a cold unimpassioned nature which it took a great deal to stir into life. What first attracted him in Clorinde was this spice of mystery, the story of a past-away life and the yearning for a new existence in the future which he could read in the depths of her big goddess-like eyes. He had heard disgraceful stories about her, of her earliest love-affair with a coachman, and of a subsequent connection with a banker who had paid for the girl's fictitious virginity with the little house in the Champs Élysées. However, every now and then she seemed to him so child-like that he felt doubts as to the truth of what he had been told, and he returned again and again to try and find out the

secret of this strange girl, who became a living enigma to him, the solution of which interested him as much as some intricate political problem. Till then he had felt a scornful disdain for women, and the first one who excited his interest was certainly as strangely a complicated being as could be imagined.

Upon the morrow of the day when Clorinde had gone on her hired horse to give Rougon a sympathetic shake of the hand at the door of the Council of State, Rougon himself went to pay her a visit. She had made him solemnly promise to do so. She wanted, she said, to show him something which would brighten him up from his gloomy moods. He laughingly called her his "pet vice ;" and he always forgot all his worries when he was with her, and felt bright and amused. She kept his mind, too, always on the alert, for he was still seeking the key to her history, and he was as yet no nearer to a solution than he was on the first day he had attempted it. As he turned the corner of the Rue Marbeuf, he glanced at the house in the Rue du Colisée which was occupied by Delestang, whom he fancied he had several times seen peering through the half opened Venetian shutters of his study at Clorinde's window on the other side of the avenue ; but to-day the shutters were closed. Delestang had probably gone off to his model-farm of La Chamade.

The door of the Balbis' house was always wide open. At the foot of the stair-case Rougon met a little dark-complexioned woman, with her hair untidily fastened up and wearing a tattered yellow dress. She was biting at an orange as though it were an apple.

"Is your mistress at home, Antonia ?" he asked her.

Her mouth was too full to allow her to reply, and so she shook her head energetically and smiled. Her lips were streaming with orange juice and she screwed up her little eyes which looked like two drops of ink upon her dark skin.

Rougon was quite accustomed to the irregular ways of the Balbis' servants and he went up the stair-case. On his way up he met a great lanky man-servant, with a face like a brigand's and a long black beard, who coolly stared at him without giving him the balustrade-side. When he reached the landing of the first floor, he found himself confronted by three open doors, but he saw no one about. The door on his left hand was that of Clorinde's bed-room. Curiosity prompted him to pop his head inside. Although it was four o'clock in the afternoon,

the bed had not been made nor the room tidied. Upon a screen stretched in front of the bed and half concealing the disordered bedclothes, the petticoats, which the girl had worn on the previous day, had been hung to dry, being all soiled and splashed at the bottom. The wash-basin, full of soapy water, was lying on the floor in front of the window, and the cat of the house, a grey one, was lying asleep, comfortably huddled up in the midst of a heap of clothes.

It was upon the second-floor that Clorinde was generally to be found, in the gallery which she had successively turned into a studio, a smoking-room, a hot-house, and a summer drawing-room. As Rougon ascended upwards he heard an increasing uproar of voices, shrill laughter and the noise of furniture being overturned; and when he reached the door he could hear a consumptive piano and the sounds of singing. He knocked at the door twice without receiving any answer, and then he determined to enter.

"Ah! bravo, bravo, here he is!" cried Clorinde, clapping her hands.

Rougon, whom it was generally so difficult to put out of countenance, remained timidly standing by the door for a moment. In front of the piano, the keys of which he was striking furiously so as to extract a fuller sound from the instrument, there sat the Chevalier Rusconi, the Italian Minister, a handsome dark-complexioned man, who was, under other circumstances, a grave diplomatist. In the middle of the room the deputy La Rouquette was waltzing with a chair, the back of which he was amorously encircling with his arms, and he was so enthusiastically absorbed in his amusement that he had littered the carpet with other chairs which he had overturned in his gyrations. In the bright light of one of the window-recesses, Clorinde was standing upon the centre of a table, posing herself in the character of the huntress Diana, with naked thighs, naked arms, naked throat, naked everything in fact, all in the most perfectly unconcerned way in front of a young man who was sketching her with a piece of charcoal on white canvas. On a couch three serious looking men with their legs crossed, were silently smoking big cigars and looking at Clorinde.

"Wait a moment! don't move!" cried the Chevalier Rusconi to Clorinde, who was going to jump down from the table. "I am going to make some presentations."

Then followed by Rougon, he said playfully, as he went past

Monsieur La Rouquette, who had dropped breathless into an easy chair :

“ Monsieur La Rouquette whom you already know ; a future minister.”

Then, going up to the artist, he continued :

“ Monsieur Luigi Pozzo, my secretary ; diplomatist, painter, musician and lover.”

He had overlooked the three men upon the couch, but he caught sight of them as he turned round, and he dropped his playful tones as he bowed towards them and said in a ceremonious voice :

“ Monsieur Brambilla, Monsieur Staderino, Monsieur Viscardi, all three political refugees.”

The three Venetians bowed without removing their cigars from their lips. The Chevalier Rusconi was returning to the piano when Clorinde briskly called him back and reproached him with being a very careless master of the ceremonies. Then, motioning towards Rougon, she just said, though in a very significant and flattering tone :

“ Monsieur Eugène Rougon.”

Everyone bowed again ; and Rougon, who a moment ago had been rather afraid of some compromising pleasantry, felt surprised at the unexpected tact and dignity shown by this great half-naked girl in her gauze costume. He took a seat and inquired after the Countess Balbi, as was his custom. He even pretended every time he came that his visit was intended for the mother, as this seemed more consonant with strict propriety.

“ I should have been very glad to have paid my respects to her,” he said, using the formula which he always made use of under the circumstances.

“ But mother is there ! ” cried Clorinde, pointing to a corner of the room with the end of her bow of gilt wood.

The countess was indeed there, reclining in a deep easy chair behind a variety of other furniture. This discovery came quite as a surprise. The three political refugees were evidently quite unaware of her presence there, for they at once rose from their couch and bowed to her. Rougon went up to her and shook hands with her. He remained standing while the countess, still lying back in her chair, answered him in monosyllables with that perpetual smile of hers which never left her, even when she was ill. Then she relapsed into listless

silence, glancing out every now and then into the avenue along which a stream of carriages was passing. She had probably taken up her position there in order to watch the people. Rougon now left her.

The Chevalier Rusconi, having taken his seat again at the piano, was trying to recall an air, and gently striking the keys and humming some Italian words in low tones. Monsieur La Rouquette was fanning himself with his handkerchief. Clorinde was again seriously impersonating Diana, and Rougon, in the sudden calm which had come upon the room, was taking short steps up and down the floor, looking at the walls. The gallery was crowded up with an extraordinary collection of articles ; chairs, a secretaire, an all chest and several tables, all pushed into the middle of the apartment and forming a labyrinth of narrow passages. At one end of the room the hot-house plants, crowded together and neglected, were drooping and dying, their long hanging green leaves already attacked with rust ; at the other end there was a great heap of dried potter's clay, in which could still be recognised the crumbling arms and legs of a statue which Clorinde had roughly moulded one day when she was seized with the whim of being an artist. Although the gallery was really a very large place there was only one unencumbered spot in it, where a small square patch in front of one of the windows had been made into a kind of little drawing-room, furnished with a couch and three odd easy-chairs.

" You are quite at liberty to smoke," Clorinde said to Rougon.

He thanked her but told her that he never smoked. Then, without turning round, the girl cried out :

" Chevalier, make me a cigarette. The tobacco is in front of you, on the piano."

While the Chevalier was making the cigarette there was an interval of silence. Rougon, vexed at finding all these people in the room, was about to take up his hat, but he turned round and walked up to Clorinde ; then raising his head, he said with a smile :

" Didn't you ask me to come here because you had something to show me ? "

She did not reply immediately, but maintained her serious pose ; so he continued :

" What is it that you want to show me ? "

" Myself," she replied.

She said this word in a majestic tone, without moving a limb as she stood there on the table in her goddess-like posture. Rougon blinked his eyes and took a step backwards and gazed at her scrutinizingly. She was truly a superb creature, with her pure perfect profile and her slender neck which so gracefully joined her shoulders. She possessed, too, the majestic beauty of an admirably moulded bust. Her rounded arms and legs gleamed like marble. Her left hip was slightly advanced and this caused her body to be somewhat curved, and her right hand being held up in the air revealed from her arm-pit to her heel a long powerful and supple line which curved inwards at her waist and then swelled outwards again at her thigh. She was resting her other hand upon her bow with all the antique huntress's expression of serene strength, quite regardless of her nudity, and contemptuous of the love of man, cold, haughty, immortal.

"Charming, charming!" exclaimed Rougon, not knowing what else to say.

As a matter of fact he was finding her statuesque immobility a little wearisome. She looked so triumphant, so certain of being classically beautiful, that, if he had dared to express his thoughts, he would have criticized her as he would have done some marble statue whose conspicuous evidence of strength and firmness was distasteful to his unaesthetic eyes. He would have preferred a slimmer waist, less massive hips and a breast that was placed higher up on the body. Then he was suddenly seized with a violent desire to clasp her round the calf, and he was obliged to step backwards to prevent himself from yielding to this impulse.

"Have you looked enough now?" asked Clorinde, still quite serious and in earnest. "Wait a moment and you shall see something else."

Then, in a moment, she was no longer Diana. She dropped her bow and she became Venus. Her hands were thrown back behind her head and clasped in her hair; her bust was bent slightly backwards, thrusting up her breasts, and, as she half-opened her lips and smiled, her face was suddenly lighted up with a stream of sun-shine. She looked smaller than she had done before, and her limbs seemed plumper and more fleshy, and a sheeny tremor of desire seemed to pass over her satiny skin. She looked as though she were offering herself and trying to make herself as seductive and desirable as possible, as she

assumed the submissive yielding expression of one who longs to be closely clasped in her lover's embrace.

Monsieur Brambilla, Monsieur Staderino and Monsieur Viscardi broke out into seriously expressed applause, without throwing off their gloomy mien of conspirators.

“Brava! brava! brava!”

Monsieur La Rouquette was quite frantic in his enthusiasm, and the Chevalier Rusconi, who had stepped up to the table to give the young girl the cigarette which he had made for her, stood transfixed there, gazing at her with an ecstatic look and slightly swaying his head backwards and forwards as though he were beating the time of his admiration.

Rougon said nothing. He clasped his hands so tightly together that the joints cracked. A subtle tremor had just run through him from his neck to his heels.

He thought no more about going away, but dropped into a chair. Clorinde had already resumed her easy natural pose, and was laughing loudly and smoking her cigarette with a proud twist of her lips. She was saying that she would have delighted to be an actress. She could personate anger, tenderness, modesty, fright, and with a turn of her features or an attitude she could hit off all sorts of different people.

“Monsieur Rougon,” she asked abruptly, “would you like to see me imitate you when you are addressing the Chamber?”

She drew herself up to her full height and puffed herself out and thrust her fist out in front of her with such a droll, yet truthful, mimicry, that they all almost killed themselves with laughing. Rougon roared like a boy. He found Clorinde adorable and exquisite, but also very disturbing.

“Clorinda, Clorinda,” cried Luigi, tapping his easel gently.

She was moving about so restlessly that he was obliged to desist from his task. He had put down his charcoal and was putting a wash of colour upon the canvas with an earnest studious air. He remained quite serious in the midst of all the laughter, raising his glistening eyes to the young girl and glancing fiercely at the men with whom she was joking. It was his idea to paint her in the character of the huntress Diana, in that costume which had been the talk of all Paris ever since the ball at the embassy. He claimed to be her cousin, as they had both been born in the same street in Florence.

“Clorinda!” he repeated in a tone of anger.

“Luigi is quite right,” she said, “you are not behaving

yourselves properly, gentlemen. What a noise you are making ! Come, let us get on with our work."

Then she once more assumed her Olympian attitude, and again presented the semblance of a beautiful marble image. The men remained where they were, keeping perfectly still, as though they were rooted to the ground. Monsieur La Rouquette alone ventured to beat a gentle tattoo with the tips of his fingers on the arms of his chair. Rougon lay back and gazed at Clorinde, and gradually fell into a dreamy state in which the young girl seemed to him to expand into gigantic proportions. Certainly, he reflected, a woman was a wonderful piece of mechanism. It was a matter that he had never before thought of studying ; and now he began to have vague mental glimpses of extraordinary intricacies. For a passing moment he was filled with a distinct consciousness of the power of those naked shoulders which seemed strong enough to shake a world. To his swimming gaze Clorinde's figure seemed to be still growing larger and larger, and her gigantic stature now appeared to entirely hide the window from his sight. But he blinked his eyes sharply, and then he saw her again clearly, standing upon the table and much smaller than himself. His face broke into a smile, as he saw that he could have whipped her like a mere child, had he been so disposed, and he felt surprised that he could have entertained a moment's fear of her.

At the other end of the gallery a voice was now heard speaking in low tones. Rougon listened from force of habit, but he could distinguish nothing but a rapid murmur of Italian syllables. The Chevalier Rusconi, who had just glided behind the chair, was resting one hand upon the back of the countess's seat, and, bending respectfully towards her, he seemed to be relating some long story to her with great detail. The countess said nothing, but merely nodded her head now and again. Once, however, she made an energetic sign of negation, whereupon the Chevalier bent still closer towards her and tranquillised her with hiss of melodious voice, the murmur of which was like the warbling of a singing-bird. Rougon, through his knowledge of the dialect of Provence, at last caught a few words which made him very grave.

"Mother," Clorinde cried abruptly, "have you shown the Chevalier the telegram you got last night ?"

"A telegram !" exclaimed the Chevalier in a loud tone.

The countess pulled a bundle of letters out of her pocket

and began to search amongst them. Then she handed the Chevalier a strip of blue paper, very much crumpled.

As soon as he had glanced over it, he made a gesticulation of anger and astonishment.

“What!” he cried out in French, forgetting the presence of the others, “you knew this yesterday! And I have only learnt it this morning!”

Clorinde went off in a fresh explosion of laughter, which increased his irritation.

“And Madame la Comtesse allows me to tell her the whole story, as though she knew nothing about it! Well, as the headquarters of the legation seem to be here, I will come every day to make an abstract of the correspondence.”

The countess smiled. She again searched about in her bundle of letters and took out a second paper which she gave to the Chevalier to read. This time he seemed much pleased. Then they recommenced their conversation in whispers, and the Chevalier’s face once more wore its respectful smile. As he left the Countess, he kissed her hand.

“There! we’ve done with business,” he said in a low voice as he went to take his seat at the piano again.

He rattled off an air which was very popular in Paris that year. Then, after having ascertained what time it was, he suddenly rushed off to get his hat.

“Are you going?” asked Clorinde.

She beckoned him towards her, and she leant upon his shoulder and whispered something into his ear. He shook his head and smiled. Then he said :

“Capital, capital. I will write and mention it.”

Finally he bowed to the company and retired. Luigi touched Clorinde, who was squatting down upon the table, with his maul-stick and made her stand up again. The countess appeared to have grown tired of watching the stream of carriages in the *avenue*, for she pulled the bell-rope that hung behind her as soon as she lost sight of the Chevalier’s brougham, which was quickly lost in the crowd of landaus which were coming back from the Bois. The great lanky man-servant with the brigand’s face answered her summons, leaving the door wide open behind him. The countess leant heavily on his arm, and slowly crossed the room through the midst of the men, who stood up and bowed. She replied to their salutations with a smiling nod. When she reached the door, she turned and said to Clorinde:

"I have got my headache again ; I am going to lie down a little."

"Flaminio," cried the young girl to the servant who was supporting her mother, "put a hot iron at her feet."

The three political refugees did not sit down again. They remained standing in a row for a moment or two, finishing their cigars, the stumps of which they then threw with the same precise and correct gestures behind the heap of potter's clay. Then they filed past Clorinde and went away in procession.

"Yes, indeed," Monsieur La Rouquette, who had just commenced a serious conversation with Rougon, remarked, "I know very well that this question of sugars is one of the greatest importance. It affects a whole branch of French commerce. But the unfortunate part of the matter is that no one in the Chamber seems to have thoroughly studied the subject."

Rougon, who was feeling a little bored, replied by merely nodding his head. The young deputy drew closer to him and threw an expression of sudden gravity into his girlish face as he continued :

"I myself have an uncle in the sugar trade. He has one of the largest refining-houses in Marseilles. I went to stay with him for three months, and I took notes, very copious notes. I talked to the workmen and I made myself conversant with the whole subject. I was intending, you understand, to make a speech in the Chamber on the matter."

He stuck to Rougon and gave himself a deal of trouble in order to talk to the latter upon the only subjects which he thought would interest him ; being very anxious, at the same time, to appear to him in the light of a sound and earnest politician.

"But you have never made a speech," interposed Clorinde, who seemed to be getting impatient of Monsieur La Rouquette's presence.

"No, I haven't made a speech," he replied ; "I thought I had better not. At the last moment I felt afraid that my figures might not be quite correct."

Rougon looked at him keenly and asked him in a grave tone :

"Do you know how many pieces of sugar are consumed every day at the Café Anglais ?"

For a moment Monsieur La Rouquette seemed quite confused and he stared with a blank expression. Then he broke out into a peal of laughter.

"Ah! very good! very good!" he cried. "I understand now. You are chaffing me. But that is a question of sugar. What I was speaking about was a question of sugars. Very good that, eh? You'll let me repeat the joke, won't you?"

He wriggled about in his chair with pleased self-satisfaction. The rosy hue came back to his cheeks again and he seemed quite at his ease once more, and began to talk in his natural light manner. Clorinde attacked him upon the subject of women. She had seen him, she said, two nights previously at the Variétés with a little fair woman, very plain and with hair like a poodle's. At first the young man denied the accusation. Then, growing irritated at Clorinde's cruel remarks about the "little poodle," he forgot himself and began to defend her, saying that she was a highly respectable lady and not nearly so bad as Clorinde tried to make out, and he began to speak of her hair, and her waist, and her legs. Clorinde, however, grew quite scathing, and at last Monsier La Rouquette cried out:

"She's expecting me now, and I must be off."

As soon as he had closed the door behind him, the young girl clapped her hands triumphantly, and exclaimed:

"There, he's gone at last. Good riddance to him."

Then she jumped down lightly from the table and ran up to Rougon, and gave him both her hands. She put on her most winning expression and expressed her regret that he had not found her alone. What trouble she had had, she exclaimed, in getting all those people to go! Some people couldn't understand anything. What a goose that La Rouquette was with his sugars. Now, however, there was no one to disturb them, and they could talk. She had led him to a couch as she was speaking, and he had sat down without letting go her hands, when Luigi began to tap with his maul-stick, exclaiming in a tone of irritation.:

"Clorinda! Clorinda!"

"Oh yes, of course, the portrait," she cried, laughingly.

She made her escape from Rougon, and ran off and bent down behind the artist with a soft caressing expression. How pretty it was, she cried, what he had done! It was very good indeed; but, really, she was feeling rather tired and would like to have a quarter of an hour's rest. He could go on with the dress in the meantime. There was no occasion for her to pose for the dress. Luigi cast fiery glances at Rougon, and went on muttering angry-sounding words. Then Clorinde said

something to him very quickly in Italian, knitting her brows, though still continuing to smile. This reduced Luigi to silence, and he again began to pass his brush slowly over the canvass.

"It's quite true what I say," she said, as she went back and sat down by the side of Rougon; "my left leg is quite numb."

She gave it several little blows with her hand, to make the blood circulate, she explained. Beneath her gauze skirt her rosy knees could be seen; but she seemed to have quite forgotten her naked condition. She bent over towards Rougon, gliding her bare shoulder across the rough cloth of his over-coat. Then the touch of a button sent a sudden tremor through her bosom, and she looked at herself and blushed deeply. She sprang up hastily and fetched a piece of black lace which she wrapped round her.

"I feel a little cold," she said, when she had wheeled an easy-chair in front of Rougon and sat down in it.

Nothing but her naked wrists now peeped out from beneath the lace in which she had wrapped herself. She had knotted it round her neck like an enormous cravat, and her chin was buried behind it. The whole of her bust was completely concealed in its folds, and she was a mass of black. Her face had turned pale and grave.

"Well, what is that has happened to you?" she exclaimed.
"Tell me all about it."

She questioned him about his fall with quite daughterly curiosity. She was a foreigner, she told him, and she made him repeat to her three times over certain details which she said she did not understand. She kept interrupting him with little Italian ejaculations, and he could read in her clear eyes the interest she took in what he was telling her. Why had he quarrelled with the Emperor? How could he bring himself to give up such a lofty position? Who were his enemies, for him to allow himself to be worsted in this way? And as he hesitated and seemed unwilling to make the confessions which she was trying to extort from him, she looked at him with an expression of such affectionate candour, that he threw off all reserve and told her the whole story from beginning to end. Soon she seemed to have learnt all she wanted to know, and she began to ask him several questions quite unconnected with the matter which had been engaging their attention, and the singularity of which surprised Rougon. Then she clasped her hands together

and dropped into silence. She had closed her eyes and was buried in deep thought.

"Well?" said Rougon, with a smile.

"Oh," she murmured, "all this has made me quite sad."

Rougon was touched. He tried to take hold of her hands again, but she buried them in the lace, and thus they both sat in silence. Some two minutes afterwards, she opened her eyes again, and said :

"You have formed some plans, I suppose?"

Rougon looked at her keenly. He was feeling a touch of suspicion. But she seemed so adorable as she lay back in the easy chair in a languid attitude, as though the troubles of her "dear friend" had quite broken her down, that he paid no further heed to the chilling thought. Clorinde plied him with flattery. She was quite sure, she said, that he could not long be allowed to remain aloof and that he would be master again some day. She was confident that he had high ambitions and trusted hopefully in his star, for she could plainly read as much on his brow. Why wouldn't he take her for his confidante? She was very discreet, and it would make her so happy to share with him his hopes for the future. Rougon, quite infatuated and still trying to grasp the little hands which concealed themselves beneath the lace, kept nothing back, but openly confessed everything to the girl, his hopes as well as his certainties. He required no further urging from her, and she had only to leave him free to talk on, refraining from even so much as a gesture for fear of checking him. She kept her eyes fixed scrutinizingly upon him, examining him searchingly limb by limb, fathoming his skull, weighing his shoulders and measuring his chest. He was certainly a solid, well-built man, who, with a turn of his wrist, could toss her, strong as she was, on to his back and carry her off without the least difficulty.

"Ah! dear friend," she exclaimed abruptly, "it is not I who have ever felt any doubts."

Then she sprang up from her seat, and, spreading out her arms, let the lace slip off her. She seemed even more naked than before, for she strained out her breast and heaved her shoulders free of her gauze covering with such a sinuous motion of her body that it seemed as if she were going to escape from her dress altogether. It was a moment's vision, a sort of reward and promise to Rougon. "Ah!" she cried, "my lace has fallen down." Then she hastily picked it up again, and knotted it round her more tightly than before.

"Oh!" she next exclaimed, "there's Luigi growling."

She hastened up to the artist again, and bent over him a second time and whispered rapidly into his neck. Now that she was no longer by his side with her vibrating presence, Rougon rubbed his hands roughly together, feeling enervated and almost angry. The girl had exerted the most extraordinary influence over him and he resented it. If he had been a lad of twenty, he told himself, he could not have acted more foolishly. She had just wheedled him into a confession as though he had been a mere child; while he, for the last two months, had been doing his best to make her speak and had succeeded in extracting nothing but peals of laughter from her. She had merely had to deny him her little hands for a moment, and then he had foolishly forgotten all his prudence and had told her everything in order to gain possession of them.

However, Rougon smiled a smile of conscious strength. He could break her in, he told himself, whenever he liked. Wasn't it she herself who was challenging him? Then a crowd of dishonourable thoughts flitted through his mind, a plan to seduce her and then leave her, when he had shown her that he was her master. He certainly could not, he thought, go on playing the part of an imbecile with this girl who so freely showed him her naked shoulders. He was by no means sure that the lace had slipped off without her assistance.

"Would you say that my eyes were grey?" Clorinde now asked him, stepping towards him again.

He rose and looked at her quite closely, but she bore his inspection without a quiver of her eyelids. But when he proceeded to reach out his hands, she gave him a tap. There was no occasion to touch her. She had become very cold, now. She wrapped herself closely in her piece of lace, and her modesty seemed to take alarm at the least hole in it. It was all in vain that Rougon joked and jested and even made a pretence of using force. She only covered herself up the more closely and broke out into little cries when he laid his hand upon the lace; and she refused to sit down again.

"I prefer walking about a little," she said; "it stretches my legs."

Then Rougon followed her and they walked up and down the room together. He tried, in his turn, to extract a confession from her. As a rule, she could not be got to answer questions, and her conversation usually consisted of sudden jumps and

starts, interrupted by ejaculations and mingled with the preambles of stories which she never finished. When Rougon adroitly questioned her about the fortnight in the previous month, during which she and her mother had been absent from Paris, she launched out into an interminable string of anecdotes about her journeyings. She had been everywhere, to England, Spain, Germany; and she had seen everything. Then she commenced a series of trifling remarks upon food, and the fashions and the weather. Now and then, she began some story, in which she herself figured with well-known persons, whom she named; and then Rougon listened attentively, hoping that she was at last going to make some real revelation; but she either turned the story off into some childish nonsense or stopped short and left it unfinished altogether. That day, as before, he learnt absolutely nothing. Her face preserved its impenetrable smile, and she remained secretively reserved in the midst of all her boisterous freedom. Rougon, quite confused and mystified by the different extraordinary stories he had heard, which gave the lie one to the other, was utterly unable to determine whether he had before him a mere girl whose innocence extended even to foolishness, or a keen-witted woman who cunningly affected simplicity.

She was telling him about an adventure that had happened to her in a little town in Spain, and of the gallantry of a traveller who had given up his bed to her while he himself slept upon a chair, when she suddenly broke off and exclaimed:

“ You mustn’t go back to the Tuileries. Make yourself missed.”

“ Thank you, Mademoiselle Machiavel,” he replied, with a laugh.

She laughed louder than he did, but none the less she went on giving him excellent advice. As he still kept sportively trying to pinch her arms, she seemed to grow vexed and cried out that it was impossible to talk to him seriously for a couple of minutes together. Ah! if she were a man, she said, she would mount high. Men were so light-headed.

“ Come now and tell me about your friends,” she continued, seating herself upon the edge of the table, while Rougon remained standing in front of her.

Luigi, who had kept his eyes fixed upon them, now violently closed his paint-box and exclaimed:

“ I’m going ! ”

Clorinde ran up to him and brought him back and promised to resume her position again. She probably, felt afraid of being left alone with Rougon, for when Luigi consented to remain, she began to make further excuses for delaying the resumption of her impersonation of Diana.

"Just let me get something to eat," she said; "I am so very hungry. Just a couple of mouthfuls."

Then she opened the door and called out:

"Antonia! Antonia!"

She gave an order in Italian, and she had just seated herself again upon the edge of the table when Antonia came into the room, holding upon each of her outspread hands a slice of bread and butter. She held out her hands to Clorinde as though they had been plates, breaking out into a giggling laugh as she did so, a laugh which made her mouth look like a red gash across her dusky face. Then she went away, wiping her hands upon her dress. Clorinde called her back and told her to get a glass of water.

"Will you have some?" she said to Rougon, "I'm very fond of bread and butter. Sometimes I put sugar on it; but it doesn't do to be so extravagant always."

She certainly was not given to extravagance, and Rougon had found her one morning breakfasting off a fragment of cold omelet which had been left over from the previous day. He rather suspected her of avarice, which is an Italian vice.

"I'll be ready in three minutes, Luigi," she said, as she began her first slice of bread and butter.

Then turning again to Rougon, who was still standing in front of her, she exclaimed:

"Now there's Monsieur Kahn, for instance: tell me about him. How did he get to be a deputy?"

Rougon yielded to this fresh request, hoping that he would be able somehow to worm some information out of the girl. He had found out that she was very curious about everyone, and that she was ever on the alert to gather information concerning the varied indiscretions and intrigues in the midst of which her life was passed.

"Oh!" he replied, with a laugh, "Kahn was born a deputy. He cut his teeth on the benches of the Chamber. As early as Louis Philippe's time he sat in the right centre and he supported the constitutional monarch with a youthful enthusiasm. After 1848 he went over to the left centre, still keeping very

enthusiastic. He made his confession of the republican faith in a magnificent style. Now he has gone back to the right centre and he is a passionate supporter of the Empire. As for the rest, he is the son of a Jewish banker at Bordeaux. He has some blast furnaces at Bressuire, has made a specialty of financial and industrial questions, lives in a quiet way until he comes into the large fortune which he will one day secure, and he was promoted to the rank of officer in the Legion of Honour on the fifteenth of last August—”

Rougon hesitated for a moment and seemed to be thinking.

“No,” he resumed, “I don’t think I have omitted anything. He has no children.”

“What! is he married?” exclaimed Clorinde, and she expressed by a gesture that she took no further interest in Monsieur Kahn. He was an impostor: he had never let them know that he had a wife. Rougon then explained to her that Madame Kahn lived a very quiet and retired life; and without waiting to be questioned further, he continued :

“Would you like to hear Béjuin’s biography now?”

“No, no,” replied the young girl.

But he went on with it nevertheless.

“He comes from the Polytechnical School. He has written pamphlets which no one has read. He is head of the Saint-Florent cut-glass works, about seven or eight miles from Bourges. It was the perfect of the Cher who discovered him—”

“Oh, give over!” cried Clorinde.

“He is a very worthy fellow, votes straight, never speaks, is very patient and waits contentedly till one thinks of him, but he is always on the spot to take care that one sha’n’t forget him. I got him named chevalier—”

Clorinde impatiently put her hand over Rougon’s mouth, as she exclaimed :

“Oh, he is married too! He isn’t a bit interesting. I saw his wife at your house. She is a perfect bundle! She invited me to go and see the cut-class works at Bourges.”

She now swallowed the last mouthful of her first slice of bread and butter. Then she drank a great gulp of water. Her legs were hanging over the edge of the table, and as she leaned a little on one side with her neck bent back, she swung them about with a mechanical motion, the rhythmical oscillations of which Rougon followed with his eyes. With each backward and

forward motion her calves surged up beneath the gauze of her costume.

“And Monsieur Du Poizat?” She asked, after a pause.

“Du Poizat has been a sub-prefect,” was all that Rougon replied.

She glanced at him, surprised at the shortness of his account.

“I know that,” she said. “What else?”

“Well, by-and-bye he will be a prefect, and then he will be decorated.”

She saw that he did not want to say anything further on the subject of Du Poizat; and she had merely mentioned his name at random. She now commenced to count over the names of different men upon her fingers. She began by touching her thumb, as she said :

“Monsieur d’Escorailles; he is flippant, he is in love with every woman—Monsieur La Rouquette; he’s no good, I know him only too well—Monsieur de Combelot; he’s another married man—”

Then, as she stopped short at the ring-finger, not being able to think of any other name, Rougon said to her, keeping his eyes fixed keenly upon her :

“You are forgetting Delestang.”

“So I am!” she exclaimed. “Tell me about him!”

“He is a handsome fellow,” said Rougon, still keeping his eyes fixed upon the young girl. “He is very rich, and I have always prophesied a great future for him.”

He went on this strain, exaggerating his praises and doubling his figures. The model-farm of La Chamade, he said, was worth a couple of million francs. Delestang would certainly be a minister some day. Clorinde, however, kept her mouth twisted scornfully.

“He is a great stupid,” she said at last.

“What?” cried Rougon with a subtle smile.

He seemed quite charmed by what she had said; and then, with one of those sudden transitions which were habitual with her, she asked him a fresh question, looking keenly at him in her turn.

“I suppose you know Monsieur de Marsy very well?”

“Oh yes, we know each other very well,” he replied unconcernedly, seeming amused that the girl should have asked such a question.

Then he became serious; and showed himself very fair and just-minded.

"Marsy is a man of extraordinary intelligence," he continued. "I am honoured by having such a one for my enemy. He has filled every position. At twenty-eight years of age, he was a colonel. Later on, he was at the head of a great business. And since then, he has occupied himself successively with agriculture, finance and commerce. I hear, too, that he paints portraits and writes novels."

Clorinde had grown thoughtful and was forgetting her bread and butter.

"I was talking to him the other day," she said in a low tone. "He is splendidly built. He walks like a queen's son."

"In my estimation," Rougon continued, "it is his wit that spoils him. My idea of ability is quite different. I have heard him making puns under the gravest circumstances. Well, anyhow he has been very successful, and he is as much the sovereign as the Emperor himself. All these bastards are lucky fellows. To refer to mere physical matters, he has a grip of iron, firm and resolute hands, though finely and delicately moulded."

Clorinde had unconsciously let her eyes wander to Rougon's large hands. He saw that she was looking at them, and he smilingly continued :

"Ah, mine are mere paws, aren't they? That is why Marsy and I have never been able to get on well together. He gallantly sabres his foes without soiling his white gloves, while I knock mine down."

He clenched his heavy hairy fists, and shook them, seeming to take a pride in their enormous size. Clorinde took up the second slice of bread and butter and dug her teeth into it, still appearing to be absorbed in thought. At length she raised her eyes to Rougon's face.

"And now about yourself?" she asked.

"Ah, you want to hear my history, do you?" he said. "Well, it's very easily told. My grandfather sold vegetables. I myself, till I was thirty-eight years of age, kicked my heels as a country lawyer in the depths of the provinces. Yesterday I was unknown, for I have not, like our friend Kahn, lent my strength to back up every Government in turn, and I have not come, like Béjuin, from the Polytechnical School. I cannot boast of little Escorailles' fine name or of poor Combelot's handsome face. I haven't even as good family connections as La Rouquette, who is indebted for his seat in the Chamber to his sister, the widow of General de Llorentz and now a lady-in-waiting. My father did

not leave me, as Delestang's left him, five millions of francs gained in the wine-trade. I was not born at the foot of a throne like the Count de Marsy was, and I haven't grown up tied to the apron-strings of a clever woman nor under the favour of Talleyrand. No, I am a self-made man ; I have only my own hands—”

Then he clapped his hands against each other, laughing loudly and turning what he had been saying into a joke. Finally he braced himself up to his full height and he looked as though he were crushing stones in his clenched fists. Clorinde gazed at him admiringly.

“ I was nothing ; I shall be whatever I like,” he continued as though he were speaking to himself and had forgotten the presence of others. “ I am a power. Those other fellows make me shrug my shoulders when they prate of their devotion to the Empire ! Do they really love it ? Do they appreciate it ? Haven't they conformed themselves to all kinds of governments ? I, I have grown up with the Empire ! I have made it and it has made me ! I was named a Chevalier after the tenth of December, an officer in January of 1851, a commander on the fifteenth of August, 1854, and a grand officer three months ago. Under the Presidency, I was entrusted for a short time with the portfolio of Public Works ; later on the Emperor charged me with a mission to England, and since then I have entered the Council of State and the Senate—”

“ And, to-morrow, what will you enter ? ” Clorinde interrupted with a laugh, beneath which she tried to conceal her ardent curiosity.

He stopped short and looked at her.

“ You are very inquisitive, Mademoiselle Machiavel,” he said.

Then Clorinde began to swing her legs about more briskly, and there was an interval of silence. Rougon, seeing her absorbed in a fresh reverie, thought that a favourable moment had come for getting a confession out of her.

“ Women—” he began.

But she interrupted him, saying in low a tone, and smiling at her own thoughts, with a vague expression in her eyes :

“ Oh, women are quite different ! ”

This was all the confession she made. She finished eating her bread and butter and drained her glass of water. Then she leapt on to her feet upon the table, with a spring that testified to her adroitness as a horsewoman.

"Now, Luigi!" she cried.

For the last moment or two the artist, who had left his seat, had been impatiently gnawing his moustache as he irritably paced up and down in front of Rougon and Clorinde. He went and sat down again with a sigh and took up his palette. The three minutes' grace which Clorinde had asked for had stretched out into a quarter-of-an-hour. Now, however, she was standing again upon the table, still enveloped in the folds of black lace. When she had placed herself in the proper attitude, she uncovered herself again with a slight movement of her hand. She was a marble statue once more, and all her modesty disappeared.

In the Champs Élysées the carriages were growing fewer. The sinking sun cast through the avenue a stream of hazy light which covered the trees with a ruddy haze that might almost have been taken for a coating of dust stirred up by the wheels of the passing vehicles. Clorinde's shoulders gleamed with a touch of sheeny gold in the light that fell through the lofty windows. The sky began to grow gradually greyer.

"Is Monsieur de Marsy's intended marriage with the Wallachian princess settled yet?" Clorinde asked.

"Yes, I think so," Rougon replied. "She is very rich, and Marsy is always short of money. And they say, besides, that he is madly in love with her."

There was no longer any feeling of constraint about their silence. Rougon stayed on, now perfectly at his ease, and thought no more of going away. He was absorbed in contemplation, and he began to pace about the room again. This Clorinde, he said to himself, was certainly a remarkably seductive creature. He was thinking of her as though he had left her some time ago; and, as he paced up and down, with his eyes fixed on the floor, his mind was occupied with dimly formulated, but very pleasing thoughts, from which he was deriving a tender pleasure. He felt as though he had just come out of a warm bath; his body was full of a delicious langour. He seemed to be breathing some strangely perfumed atmosphere, and he would have liked to throw himself upon one of the couches and drop off to sleep in the midst of that odorous air.

The sound of a voice suddenly recalled him to himself. A tall old man, whose entrance he had not observed, was kissing Clorinde on the brow, as the young girl smilingly stooped down towards him over the edge of the table.

"Good morning, my dear," he said. "How pretty you look! You are letting us see all your charms."

Then he gave a little snigger, and as Clorinde in confusion picked up her piece of black lace, he added quickly :

"No, no! You are very nice as you are! You needn't be afraid of letting us see! Ah, my dear, I have seen a good many others."

Then he turned towards Rougon, whom he addressed as "my dear colleague," as he shook his hand.

"I've dandled her many a time upon my knees," he said, "when she was a little thing. Ah! what a dazzling creature she is now!"

It was old Monsieur de Plouguern. He was seventy years old. A representative of Finistère in the Chamber during the reign of Louis Philippe, he was one of the legitimist deputies who made the pilgrimage to Belgrave Square, and he sent in his resignation in consequence of the vote of censure which was passed upon himself and his companions. Later on, after the occurrences of February 1848, he manifested a sudden affection for the Republic, which he vigorously applauded from the benches of the Constituent Assembly. Now that the Emperor has granted him the well-earned refuge of the Senate, he was a Bonapartist. But he knew how to be a Bonapartist and a man of high birth and breeding at the same time. His great humility occasionally indulged itself in a spicce of opposition. Ingratitude amused him, and, though he was a sceptic to the back-bone, he defended religion and family-life. He thought that he owed that much to his name, one of the most illustrious in Brittany. Every now and then he found the Empire immoral, and he said so openly. He himself had lived a life of the most dissolute intrigue and elaborate pleasure-seeking, and stories were told of his old age which set young men dreaming. It was during a journey in Italy that he had met the Countess Balbi, whose lover he had remained for nearly thirty years. After separations, which lasted sometimes for years, they came together again for a few nights in some town where they happened to come across each other. According to some, Clorinde was his daughter, but neither he himself nor the countess knew whether this was so; and, since the girl had grown up and had become a plump and altogether desirable young woman, he asserted that he had known her father well in former days. He gazed at her with his still

glistening eyes, and he treated her with considerable freedom as being an old friend. This tall, withered, scrany old Monsieur de Plouguern bore some resemblance to Voltaire ; and the likeness was the source of much secret pleasure to him.

“ You don’t look at my portrait, godfather,” Clorinde said to him.

She called him godfather by reason of their intimacy. The old man stepped behind Luigi, and winked his eyes with the air of a connoisseur.

“ Splendid ! ” he exclaimed.

Rougon also came up, and Clorinde herself jumped down from the table to get a better view. All three of them were delighted. The picture was excellent. The artist had already covered the entire canvass with a thin coat of rose and white and yellow, as pale in tint as though he had been using water-colours. The face was wreathed with a pretty dollish smile, the lips were curved into a bow, the eyebrows symmetrically arched, and the cheeks glowing with a soft vermillion. It was a Diana fitted for the lid of a box of bon bons.

“ Oh, just look at that little freckle close to the eye ! ” cried Clorinde, clapping her hands in admiration ; “ Luigi misses nothing ! ”

Rougon, whom pictures generally wearied, was quite charmed. Just then he appreciated art, and in a tone of earnest conviction he delivered this judgment :

“ It is admirably drawn.”

“ And the colouring is excellent,” added Monsieur de Plouguern. “ Those shoulders look like real flesh. The breasts, too, are charming. The left one looks as delicate as a rose. And what arms ! This dear child has really got the most wonderful arms ! I admire that full roundness below the bend of the arm immensely ; it is a perfect model.”

Then, turning to the artist, he added :

“ Pray accept my sincerest compliments, Monsieur Pozzo. I have already seen a picture by you of a woman bathing. But this portrait will certainly excel it. Why don’t you exhibit ? I knew a diplomatist who used to play marvellously upon the violin, and yet it didn’t prevent him from attaining great success in his profession.”

Luigi bowed, feeling highly flattered. The day was now quickly waning, and so, saying that he wanted to finish an ear, he begged Clorinde to resume her position for another ten

minutes. Monsieur de Plouguern and Rougon went on discussing art. The latter confessed that his special studies had prevented him from following the artistic movement during recent years, but he expressed his great admiration for fine productions. He went on to say that he was not much affected by colour, and that he preferred a good drawing, a drawing which was capable of elevating the soul and inspiring it with great thoughts. Monsieur de Plouguern only cared about the old masters. He had visited all the galleries in Europe, and he said that he could not understand how the moderns still had the hardihood to go on painting. All the same, however, he confessed that only the previous month he had had a little room of his decorated by an artist who was quite unknown, but who certainly possessed great genius.

“He has painted me some little cupids and flowers and foliage in the most extraordinarily skilful manner,” he said. “Positively you might think you could pluck the flowers. And there are some insects upon them, butterflies, lady-birds, and flies, which you could almost swear were alive. It is all very amusing. I like amusing pictures.”

“Art is not intended to weary one,” remarked Rougon.

Just at this moment, as they were slowly pacing about the room side by side, Monsieur de Plouguern crushed something beneath the heel of his boot that made a slight explosive report.

“Hallo! What’s that?” he cried.

He picked up a chaplet, which had slipt down from an armchair into which Clorinde had emptied her pockets. One of the glass beads near the cross was shivered into atoms, and one of the arms of the cross itself, a very small silver one, was bent and flattened. The old man dangled the chaplet in his hand, and said with a slight snigger:

“My dear, why do you leave these playthings of yours lying about?”

Clorinde had turned quite crimson. She sprang down from the table, with swollen lips, and tears of anger swelling in her eyes, and, as she rapidly covered up her shoulders, she cried:

“Oh, the wretch! the wretch! he has broken my chaplet!”

She snatched it from him and then burst into tears like a child.

“There! there!” said Monsieur de Plouguern, who was still laughing. “Just look at my little devotee! The other day

she nearly tore my eyes out because I noticed a branch of palm over her bed and asked her what she used that little beosom for. There now, don't cry, you great goose ! I haven't broken your good God."

"Yes, yes," she cried, "you have injured it." With trembling hands she removed the fragments of the bead, and then, with a fresh outburst of sobs, she tried to put the cross right again. She wiped it with the ends of her fingers, as though she saw drops of blood oozing through the metal.

"It was the Pope who gave me this," she sobbed, "the first time I went with my mother to see him. He knows me very well, and he calls me his 'fair apostle,' because I told him one day that I should be glad to die for him. It was a chaplet that brought me happiness. But now it has lost its virtue, and it will attract the devil—"

"Here, give it to me !" interrupted Monsieur de Plouguern, "you will only break your nails by trying to straighten it in that way. Silver is hard, my dear."

He took the chaplet from her and tried to straighten the cross, using great care so as not to break it. Clorinde had ceased crying, and she kept her eyes fixed anxiously upon him. Rougon, too, smilingly advanced his head. He was deplorably irreligious ; so much so, indeed, that the young girl had twice all but broken with him on account of his ill-considered pleasantries.

"Ah !" muttered Monsieur de Plouguern, "this divinity of yours isn't very tender ! I'm afraid of snapping it in two, and then you would have to get another one."

He made a fresh attempt and this time the cross snapped clean in two.

"Oh dear ! oh dear !" he cried ; "it is broken this time."

Rougon began to laugh. Clorinde, with angry eyes and convulsed face, sprang back and glared at them ; then she fell upon them furiously with her fists as though she were trying to drive them out of the room. She railed at them in Italian and raved wildly.

"She's giving it us ! she's giving it us !" cried Monsieur de Plouguern gaily.

"Such are the fruits of superstition," muttered Rougon between his teeth.

The old man ceased his jesting and suddenly assumed a grave expression ; and then as Rougon still continued to

declaim in conventional phraseology against the detestable influence of the priesthood, and to deplore the shocking training of Catholic women and the degradation of priest-ridden Italy, he exclaimed in a dry tone :

“ Religion makes the greatness of states.”

“ When it doesn’t eat them away like an ulcer,” replied Rougon. “ It’s a matter of history. If the Emperor doesn’t keep the Bishops in check, he will quickly have them all on his back.”

Then Monsieur de Plouguern began to grow angry. He defended Rome, and proclaimed what he said were the convictions of the whole of his long life. Without religion, he protested, men would return to the condition of brutes. Then he went on to plead the great cause of family ties. The times, he asserted, were becoming full of abomination. Vice had never before so impudently paraded itself ; impiety had never before worked such woe in men’s consciences.

“ Don’t talk to me of your Empire !” he ended by crying ; “ it is the bastard son of the revolution. Oh yes ! we are quite aware that your Empire dreams of bringing about the humiliation of the Church. But we are wide-awake, and we shall not allow ourselves to be quietly slaughtered like a flock of sheep. Just ventilate these doctrines of yours in the Senate, my dear Monsieur Rougon, and see what comes of it.”

“ Oh, don’t talk to him any more,” cried Clorinde. “ If you push him too far, he will end by spitting upon the crucifix. He is damned.”

Rougon, quite overcome by this onset, merely bowed. Then there was an interval of silence, during which the young girl searched about on the floor for the arm that had been broken off the cross. When she found it, she carefully wrapt it up with the chaplet in a piece of a newspaper. She was growing calmer.

“ Ah, my dear !” Monsieur de Plouguern suddenly exclaimed, “ I haven’t told you yet why I came to see you. I have got a box at the Palais Royal for this evening, and I am going to take you with me.”

“ Oh, you dear godfather !” cried Clorinde, turning quite rosy again with pleasure. “ Let us go and tell mother.”

She gave the old man a kiss, as a reward, she said ; and then she turned to Rougon with a smile, and, stretching out her hand to him, she said with the sweetest expression :

"You won't bear me a grudge, will you? Please don't make me angry again with your pagan talk. I quite lose my head when anyone makes fun of religion: I should quarrel with my best friends over it."

Luigi had by this time pushed his easel into a corner, having given up all hope of getting the ear finished that day. He took up his hat, and gave the young girl a slight touch upon the shoulder to make her aware of his departure. She accompanied him on to the landing, closing the door behind her as she went out of the room. They took a noisy leave of each other, for a slight scream of Clorinde's could be heard, drowned in a burst of smothered laughter. When she returned into the room, she said:

"I am going to change my dress now, unless my god-father would like to take me to the Palais Royal as I am."

They all laughed merrily at the notion. It was now dusk. When Rougon took his leave, Clorinde went downstairs with him, leaving Monsieur de Plouguern by himself while she put on another dress. It was now quite dark on the staircase. Clorinde went down the steps in front of Rougon without speaking a word and so slowly that the latter felt her gauze costume rustling against his knees. When she reached the door of her bedroom she went inside, and took a step or two forward before turning round. Rougon had followed her. A murky light fell upon the unmade bed, upon the wash-bowl, upon the floor, and the cat which was still sleeping in the heap of clothes.

"You won't bear me a grudge, will you?" she said in low tones, stretching out her hands towards him.

He assured her that he would not. He had taken hold of her hands, and now he began to slip his own up her arms as far as her elbows, gently pushing them up beneath the black lace so that his big fingers might not tear anything. The girl gave her arms a slight shake as though she wanted to make the operation easier for him. They were standing in the shadow of the screen and they could not see each other's faces. In the midst of this room, the close atmosphere of which impeded his breathing freely, Rougon again became aware of that penetrating perfume which had previously intoxicated him. But when his hands passed the girl's elbows, their grip grew so rough that Clorinde escaped from his grasp and he heard her calling through the door which had been left open:

“Antonia, bring a light and get me my grey dress.”

When Rougon reached the avenue of the Champs Élysées he felt dazed, and he stood for a moment to inhale the fresh breeze which was blowing from over the Arc de Triomphe. The gas-lamps of the avenue, which was now quite deserted by the carriages, were being lighted one by one, piercing the darkness with a stream of sparkling points. Rougon felt as though he had just had an apoplectic fit.

“Ah! no,” he said aloud; “it would be too foolish.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE baptismal procession was to start from the Pavillon de l'Horloge at five o'clock. Its route was to be along the great avenue of the gardens of the Tuileries, the Place de la Concorde, the Rue de Rivoli, the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, the Pont d'Arcole, the Rue d'Arcole and the Place du Parvis.

By four o'clock there was an immense crowd assembled near the Pont d'Arcole. There, in the breach which the river made in the midst of the city, a whole people could find accommodation. It afforded a sudden opening out of the field of view, allowing the Ile Saint Louis to be seen in the distance, with the black line of the Pont Louis Philippe. The narrow arm on the left shelved down into a dense mass of low buildings ; while, from the broader one on the right, there could be seen a far-reaching prospect shrouded in purplish vapour, amid which the trees of the Port aux Vins showed like a green patch. On both sides, from the Quai Saint Paul to the Quai de la Mégisserie, from the Quai Napoléon to the Quai de l'Horloge, the foot-pavements stretched on either side of the roadways ; and, in front of the bridge, the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville afforded a large, open, level space. And over all this wide expanse, the sky, a bright, warm June sky, spread its vast vault of blue.

When the half-hour struck, there were crowds everywhere. All along the foot-ways there were endless lines of eager spectators. A sea of human heads, that was continually increasing, filled the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville. Opposite, the windows of the old houses on the Quai Napoléon were thrown widely open, and their black recesses were crowded with faces ; and even from the gloomy alleys that looked on to the river, the Rue Colombe, the Rue Saint Landry and the Rue Glatigny, women's caps, with their ribbons streaming in the breeze, could be seen leaning forward. Upon the Pont Notre Dame there was a serried mass of sight-seers, leaning their elbows upon the stone parapet, as though it were the velvet balustrade of some colossal balcony. Further down, the Pont Louis Philippe was

swarming with a crowd of moving black figures ; and in the most distant windows which showed their regular streaks on the grey and yellow fronts of the line of houses there could every now and then be seen the gleam of some gay dress. Men were standing upon the roofs in the midst of the chimney stacks. And moreover people who were too far away to be distinguished, were looking through telescopes from the tops of their terraces in the Quai de la Tournelle. The declining sun shone brightly, and seemed to be smiling over this sea of heads, while gay parasols spread out their bright surfaces like stars in the midst of the medley of skirts and coats.

But there was one thing that was conspicuously visible from every side, from all the quays and bridges and windows, and that was a design of a colossal grey overcoat painted in fresco on the blank wall of a house six stories high. The sleeve was bent at the elbow as though the garment still retained the shape and form of a body that had disappeared from within it. Widely conspicuous in the bright sunshine over the heads of the swarming sight-seers, this gigantic advertisement presented a most notable appearance.

A double line of troops kept a clear way for the progress of the procession through the crowd. The National Guards were drawn up on the right hand, and the regular troops on the left. One end of this double line terminated in the Rue d'Arcole, which was gaudy with banners, and from the windows of which hung bright coloured cloths that flapped gently against the whole length of the dingy houses. The bridge, which had been kept free from the crowd, was the only clear spot in this general invasion of every accessible corner, and it presented a strange appearance with its single, gently curved iron span so empty and deserted. But, lower down, on the banks of the river, the crowd commenced again. The citizens in their Sunday clothes had spread out their pocket-handkerchiefs and had seated themselves by the side of their wives, settling themselves down for a whole afternoon of lounging idleness. On the other side of the bridge, in the middle of the wide stretch of river, which was of a deep blue tint shot with green, a crew of boatmen in red blouses were working their oars to keep their boat on a level with the Port aux Fruits. By the Quai de Gèvres there was a laundry with its wood-work greened by the water, in which the laundresses could be heard laughing and beating their clothes. All this teeming horde of people,

numbering from three to four hundred thousand, kept raising their heads every now and then and glancing towards the towers of Notre Dame which rose up square and massive above the houses of the Quai Napoléon. Gilded by the declining sun, and wearing a ruddy tint in the clear atmosphere, they shook the air with the clanging peals of their bells.

Three or four false alarms had already caused a large amount of jostling in the crowd.

"I tell you that they won't be here before half-past five," said a tall man who was sitting in front of a café on the Quai de Gèvres with Monsieur and Madame Charbonnel.

It was Gilquin, Théodore Gilquin, Madame Mélanie Correur's old lodger, and Rougon's redoubtable friend. To-day, he was dressed in a complete suit of yellow duck, stained and creased and worn at the seams, for which he had paid twenty-nine francs. His boots were split, and he was wearing light coloured gloves, and a straw hat without a ribbon. Gilquin considered that when he wore gloves he was in full dress. He had been acting since noon as a guide to the Charbonnels, whose acquaintance he had made one evening in the kitchen at Rougon's house.

"You shall see everything, my children," he said to them, as he brushed aside with his hands his long black moustaches which swept across his tipsy-looking face. "You have put yourselves into my hands, haven't you? Very well then, let me manage our little holiday."

Gilquin had already drunk three glasses of brandy and five glasses of beer. For the last two hours he had been keeping the Charbonnels prisoners at the café, getting them there so early upon the pretext that it was absolutely necessary to be in good time. It was a little café with which he was well acquainted, and where they would be very comfortable, he told them, and he seemed on the most friendly terms with the waiter. The Charbonnels resigned themselves to their fate, and listened to his flow of talk, feeling much surprised at the abundance and variety of his conversation. Madame Charbonnel had declined to take anything beyond a glass of *eau sucrée*, and Monsieur Charbonnel had a glass of anisette, a liquor with which he occasionally indulged himself at the Commercial Club at Plassans. Gilquin discoursed to them about the Baptism as explicitly as though he had spent the morning at the Tuileries in acquiring information.

"The Empress is in very high spirits," he said. "She got over her confinement splendidly. She's a magnificent creature ! You will see by-and-by what a beauty she is. The Emperor got back from Nantes on the day before yesterday. He went there on account of the floods. What a dreadful calamity those floods are !"

Madame Charbonnel pushed her chair back. She was beginning to feel a little afraid of the crowd which was streaming past her in increasing numbers.

"What a lot of people !" she exclaimed.

"Yes, indeed," cried Gilquin, "I should think so. There are more than three hundred thousand visitors in Paris. Excursion trains have been bringing them here for the last week from all parts of the country. See, over yonder there are some people from Normandy, and there are some from Gascony, and some from Franche-Comté. I can spot them all at once ; I've knocked about a good deal in my time."

Then he told them that the courts were closed, and that the Bourse was shut up, and that all the clerks in the government-offices had got a holiday. The whole capital was holding festival in honour of the Baptism. Then he began to quote figures, and to calculate what the ceremony and rejoicings would cost. The Corps Législatif had voted four hundred thousand francs, he told them, but that was a mere nothing, for a groom at the Tuileries had informed him that the procession alone would cost nearly two hundred thousand francs. If the Emperor got off with a million from the civil list, he might think himself lucky. The layette alone had cost a hundred thousand francs.

"A hundred thousand francs !" cried Madame Charbonnel in amazement. "Why, how can they have possibly spent all that ? What can it have gone in ?"

Gilquin laughed complacently as he told her that there was some lace which had cost an enormous sum. He himself had travelled in the lace-business in former days, he informed her. Then he went on with his calculations. Fifty thousand francs had gone in giving assistance to the parents of children born in wedlock on the same day as the little prince, and of whom the Emperor and Empress had expressed their intention to be godfather and godmother respectively. Then eighty-five thousand francs would be spent in purchasing medals for the authors of the cantatas which were sung in the theatres. Finally he went on to tell them about the memorial medals distributed

to the collegians, to the children of the primary schools, and the asylum, and to the non-commissioned officers and privates of the army of Paris. He had got one of them himself, and he showed it to them. It was about the size of a ten-sous-piece, and bore on one side the profiles of the Emperor and Empress, and upon the other that of the Prince Imperial, with the date of his baptism, namely, the fourteenth of June, 1856.

“Would you mind selling me this?” Monsieur Charbonnel asked.

Gilquin expressed his willingness to do so, but as the worthy Charbonnel, feeling embarrassed as to what sum he should offer him for it, gave him a twenty-sous-piece, the former magnificently declined it, saying that the medal was not worth more than ten sous. Madame Charbonnel gazed earnestly at the profiles of the imperial couple, and seemed quite affected with emotion.

“How sweet they look!” she said. “There they are, side by side, like a good, affectionate pair. See, Monsieur Charbonnel, it looks just like two heads lying on the same pillow when you look at it in this way.”

Then Gilquin again returned to the subject of the Empress, of whose charitable disposition he spoke in the most laudatory terms. In the ninth month of her pregnancy, she had devoted whole afternoons, he said, to furthering the establishment of an educational institute for poor young girls, right away in the Faubourg Saint Antoine. She had just refused to accept an offering of eighty thousand francs which had been collected in sums of five sous amongst the poorer classes for the purpose of buying a present for the young prince; and the money was, by her specially expressed desire, to be devoted to the apprenticeship of a hundred poor orphans. Gilquin, who was by this time slightly tipsy, twisted his eyes about in the most dreadful manner as he sought about for tender phrases and expressions that combined the respect of the subject with the passionate admiration of the man. He declared that he would gladly offer up his life in sacrifice at the feet of this noble woman. The murmur of the crowd seemed like a distant echo of his praises. It was now growing into a continuous shout, and over the tops of the houses the bells of Notre Dame were ringing out in full peal the clanging paean of their tumultuous joy.

“Don’t you think it’s getting time for us to go and take our

places?" timidly suggested Monsieur Charbonnel, who was getting a little tired of sitting still.

Madame Charbonnel got up from her seat and fastened her yellow shawl round her neck.

"Yes, I'm sure it is," she said. "You wanted to be there in good time, and we're going on sitting here and letting every one get there before us."

Gilquin, however, turned rather grumpy, and he brought down his fist on the top of the little zinc table objectingly. Didn't he know all about Paris? he asked; and, as Madame Charbonnel timidly dropped down into her chair again, he cried to the waiter.

"Jules, a glass of absinthe and some cigars!"

But as soon as he had dipped his big moustaches in the absinthe, he angrily called the waiter back again.

"What is this stuff you are palming off upon me? Just be good enough to take this filth away, and give me a glass out of the other bottle; the same as I had on Friday. I have travelled in the liquor-trade, my fine fellow. You can't bamboozle me."

He allowed himself to be appeased when the waiter, who seemed to be afraid of him, brought a fresh bottle, and he gave the Charbonnels friendly little taps on the shoulders, and addressed them as "old fellow" and "old lady."

"Ah! so you're itching to be on the move, are you, old lady? You'll have plenty of use for your feet between now and to-night, so you needn't be in any hurry to begin. We're very comfortable where we are, in this *café*; don't you think so, old fellow? We can take our ease and watch the people go by. We've plenty of time, I assure you, so you'd better order something else."

"Thank you, we've had all that we want," said Monsieur Charbonnel.

Gilquin had just lighted a cigar. He leaned back in his chair, inserted his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, thrust out his stomach, and began to rock himself backwards and forwards. His face was wearing an expression of perfect content. Suddenly an idea seemed to strike him.

"I'll tell you what," he cried; "I'll come for you at seven o'clock to-morrow morning, and take you off with me and show you all the festivities. We'll have a splendid day of it."

The Charbonnels looked at each other very uneasily. Gilquin proceeded to enter into the details of his programme. In the

morning they would breakfast at the Palais Royal, and stroll about the town. In the afternoon they would go to the Esplanade of the Invalides, where there would be military performances, greasy poles, three hundred balloons bearing packets of sweets, and one great balloon raining down sugar-plums. In the evening they would dine at a wine-dealer's, whom he knew, on the Quai de Billy ; then they would go and see the fire-works, the principal set-piece representing a baptistry, and afterwards they would make the round of the illuminations. He went on to tell them of the fiery cross which was to be fastened to the top of the Hôtel de la Légion d'Honneur ; of the fairy palace in the Place de la Concorde, in the composition of which nine hundred and fifty thousand pieces of coloured glass had been used ; and of the tower of Saint Jacques, whose image would look like a blazing torch stretching up into the air. As the Charbonnels, however, still seemed doubtful, he leaned forward towards them and added in lower tones :

“ And then, as we came back, we might look in at the creamery in the Rue de Seine where they give you such stunning onion soup with cheese.”

Then the Charbonnels dared no longer refuse. Their widely opened eyes were filled with an expression of mingled curiosity and childish alarm. They felt that they could not escape from this terrible man and must do whatever he told them. Madame Charbonnel simply murmured :

“ Oh ! this Paris ! this Paris ! Well, well, since we are here, I suppose we may as well see all that there is to be seen. But if you only knew, Monsieur Gilquin, how comfortable we are at Plassans ! I have a whole store-room full of preserves and sweetmeats and brandied cherries and pickles all mouldering away ! ”

“ Don’t alarm yourself, old lady,” said Gilquin, who was growing merrily familiar ; “ when you gain your cause, you can ask me to come and stay with you, and then we’ll all have a go at the jam-pots ! ”

He now poured himself out another glass of absinthe. He was perfectly tipsy. For a moment he looked at the Charbonnels with a glance of loving affection ; then he suddenly sprang on to his feet and began to wave his long arms as he cried out “ Eh ! Hallo ! you there ! ” Madame Méliane Correur was passing just in front of them, wearing a dress of dove-coloured silk. She turned her head and seemed extremely

annoyed at seeing Gilquin. However, she crossed over to them, with the majestic gait of a princess, but when she got to their table she required a deal of pressing before she would accept any refreshment.

“Come now,” cried Gilquin, “have a little glass of black-currant brandy. I know you like it. You haven’t forgotten the Rue Vanneau, eh ? We used to have fine times then, didn’t we ? Ah ! that great old stupid of a *Correur* !”

Just as Madame *Correur* was at last prevailed upon to sit down, a loud shouting was heard amongst the crowd. The promenaders scuttled off like a flock of sheep, as though they had been swept away by a gust of wind. The Charbonnels instinctively rose from their seats to resume their journey, but Gilquin’s heavy hand brought them down to their chairs again. His face was quite purple.

“Just you keep still and wait for orders. These folks are all making fools of themselves. It is only five o’clock, isn’t it ? It is the Cardinal-Legate who is coming ; and we don’t want to see the Cardinal-Legate, do we ? For my part, I think it is very neglectful of the Pope not to have come himself. When a man is a godfather, he ought to behave as such, it seems to me. I tell you that the youngster won’t be here for another half-hour.”

His intoxication was rapidly depriving him of all sense of decorum. He had cocked his chair back and begun to blow puffs of smoke into people’s faces, winking at the women and glaring defiantly at the men. A few yards away, near the Pont Notre Dame, there was a block in the road-traffic. The horses were pawing the ground with impatience, and the uniforms of high functionaries and superior officers, embroidered with gold and glittering with decorations, appeared at the windows of the carriages.

“There’s a nice show of tinsel and pewter !” sneered Gilquin with a smile expressive of great knowingness.

Then, as a brougham came up from the Quai de la Mégisserie, he almost upset the table as he sprang up and cried out :

“Hallo, Rougon !”

He stood up and saluted him with his gloved hand, and then, fearing that he had not been noticed, he snatched off his straw hat and began to wave it about. Rougon, whose senatorial uniform was attracting a deal of notice, quickly retired into the obscurity of a corner of his brougham. Then Gilquin

began to call to him, doubling his hand and using it as a speaking-trumpet. The people crowded together on the foot-way and turned round to see what was the matter with this strange-looking fellow dressed in yellow duck. At last the coachman was able to whip his horse forward and the brougham made its way on to the Pont Notre Dame.

“Do be quiet!” said Madame Correur in a suppressed tone, seizing hold of Gilquin’s arms.

But he would not sit down again at once. He stood on tip-toes and tried to follow the brougham through the crowd of other carriages, and he hurled out a last shout after the quickly disappearing wheels.

“Ah! the blackguard! just because he wears gold lace on his coat now! All the same, my boy, you were deucedly hard up once upon a time!”

The citizens and their wives who were sitting at the seven or eight tables of the little café opened their eyes in astonishment. At one of the tables there was a family, consisting of the father and mother and three children, who seemed profoundly interested in Gilquin’s proceedings. The latter fumed and puffed himself out and seemed quite delighted to find that he was attracting so much attention. He fixed his eyes searchingly upon the customers of the café, and said in a loud voice as he dropped into his seat again :

“It is I who have made Rougon what he is!”

He called upon Madame Correur, who was trying to keep him quiet, to corroborate him. She knew that it was the truth he was speaking, he proclaimed. It had all happened at the Hôtel Vanneau in the Rue Vanneau. She wouldn’t dare to deny, he asserted, that he had lent Rougon his boots a score times to enable him to go to the houses of highly-placed people and mix himself up in a lot of mysterious goings-on. In those days Rougon had nothing better of his own than an old pair of shoes, worn down at the heels, which a rag-picker wouldn’t have taken as a gift. Then with a triumphant expression he bent forward towards the family at the next table and exclaimed :

“Oh, she won’t confess it, but it was she who paid for his first pair of new boots in Paris.”

Madame Correur now turned her chair round, so as no longer to appear to be one of Gilquin’s party. The Charbonnels had become quite pale at hearing the man who was to put five hundred thousand francs into their pockets spoken of in such a contume-

lious fashion. Gilquin, however, was now fully launched, and he rattled off an endless number of stories of Rougon's early days in Paris. He himself was a philosopher, he told them, and he began to laugh and joined the parties at the different tables one after another, smoking, spitting, and drinking, and telling them that he was quite accustomed to the ingratitude of mankind, and that he was satisfied with preserving his own self-respect. He asserted again and again that it was he himself who had been the making of Rougon. At that time, he said, he was a traveller in the perfumery business, but the Republic spoilt the trade. Both he and Rougon, he asserted, had been living on the same floor in a state of starvation. Then he was struck with the idea of getting Rougon to send for some olive-oil from a producer at Plassans, and they had both wandered about the streets of Paris in different directions till ten o'clock at night with samples of olive-oil in their pockets. Rougon was not clever at the business, but sometimes he succeeded in getting good orders from the fine folks to whose houses he went in the evenings. Ah ! that Rougon was really stupider than a goose, and mean-spirited at the same time. What a traitor he had been in politics ! Here Gilquin lowered his voice a little and winked his eyes, as he let them know that he himself had played an important part in these matters, and had haunted all the low dancing-rooms crying out "Long live the Republic;" for it was necessary to profess Republicanism to get an influence over the people. The Empire certainly owed him a big debt for what he had done for it, but the Empire hadn't even thanked him. No, it was Rougon and his friends who went off with all the prizes and turned him out of doors as though he were a mangy dog. Well, on the whole, he preferred that it should be so, he would rather remain independent. He had only one regret now, and that was that he had not gone heart and soul with the Republicans and made an end of all this scum with his rifle.

"It's just the same, too, with that little Du Poizat," he said in conclusion. "He pretends not to know me ; a skinny little chap to whom I've often given a pipe of tobacco ! And yet he's a sub-prefect now ! I've often seen him in his night-shirt with big Amélie, who used to throw him outside the door when he didn't behave himself properly."

He dropped into silence for a moment and seemed suddenly overcome by tender recollections in the midst of his maudlin

tipsiness. Then, glancing round at his audience, he began again.

“ Well, you’ve just seen Rougon. I’m as tall a man as he is, and I’m the same age, and I flatter myself that I’ve got a better head upon my shoulders. Well, now, don’t you think that it would be much better for everyone if I were in that carriage instead of that great fat pig, with his body covered all over with lace ? ”

But just at this moment there was such a shouting heard on the Place de l’Hôtel de Ville, that the company at the café became much too excited to make any reply. The crowd made another rush forwards ; all the men hurried on as quickly as they could, and the women pulled up their petticoats as high as their knees, exposing their white stockings, to enable themselves to run faster. As the shouting was getting nearer to them and quickly becoming more distinct, Gilquin cried :

“ Ah ! here comes the youngster ! Hurry along and pay the score, old man, and then all of you come on after me ! ”

Madame Correur grasped hold of his yellow duck coat so as not to lose him, and Madame Charbonnel panted on close behind. Monsieur Charbonnel was almost lost in the crowd. Gilquin, by much resolute pushing and the vigorous use of his elbows, managed to open a way through the dense mass of people, and he set about his work with such a show of authority that he succeeded in getting way made for him even through the most thickly crowded parts. When he at last reached the quay he took steps for properly placing his party. By a strong effort he lifted the ladies up and seated them upon the parapet, with their legs dangling over, on the river side, and this in spite of the little cries of alarm to which they gave utterance. He himself and Monsieur Charbonnel remained standing behind them.

“ Well, my little dears, you’re in the front boxes now,” he said to them, trying to reassure them ; “ don’t be frightened, we’ll take hold of your waists.”

He slipped both his arms round Madame Correur’s plump form. The lady only smiled at him. It was impossible to get angry with him. As yet, however, they could see nothing. The Place de l’Hôtel de Ville was filled with a surging sea of heads, and it echoed with continuous cheering. In the distance waving hats, held by hands which were indistinguishable, could be seen, forming a huge black wave over the heads of

the people and rolling gradually nearer and nearer. Then the occupants of the houses on the Quai Napoléon, which fronted the Place, began to show signs of excitement. They leant forward out of the windows, crowding against each other, while their faces beamed with delighted animation as they called each other's attention with out-stretched arms to the direction of the Rue de Rivoli. For three minutes, that seemed never-ending, however, the bridge still remained empty. The bells of Notre Dame sounded louder than ever, as though some wild fit of excitement had just seized them.

Suddenly the anxious throng beheld a company of trumpeters appear upon the empty bridge. There was a great sigh of expectation. Behind the trumpeters and the band which followed them, came a general escorted by his staff, all mounted. Then came squadrons of carbineers and dragoons and hussars, and after them followed the state-carriages. There were eight of them. In those that came first sat the ladies-in-waiting, the chamberlains, the officers of the household of the Emperor and Empress, and the ladies in attendance upon the Grand Duchess of Baden, who had been deputed to represent the young prince's godmother. Gilquin, without letting go his hold of Madame Correur, told her from behind that the godmother, the Queen of Sweden, had not gone to any more trouble about the matter than the godfather had gone. Then, as the seventh and eight carriages went past, he told her the names of those who occupied them with a glibness which showed a great familiarity with court matters. Those two ladies there, he said, were the Princess Mathilde and the Princess Marie. Those three gentlemen were King Jérôme, Prince Napoleon and the Crown Prince of Sweden. The lady with them was the Grand Duchess of Baden. The procession swept on slowly. The equerries and aides-de-camp and gentlemen-in-waiting all rode holding their reins short to keep their horses from going too quickly.

"But where is the baby?" asked Madame Charbonnel impatiently.

"Oh! don't be frightened," said Gilquin with a laugh; "they haven't put him under a seat. Wait a little and you'll see him."

He tightened his arms amorously round Madame Correur, who allowed him to do so, she explained, because she was afraid of slipping into the water. Then, growing enthusiastic over

the gorgeousness of the sight, he continued, while his eyes glistened brightly :

“Isn’t it really splendid now? They’ve all got their fine feathers on to-day, haven’t they? And to think, now, that I have had a share in bringing all this about!”

He began to puff himself out as though the procession and the crowd and everything that was to be seen owed their origin to himself. After the temporary lull which had been caused by the appearance of the first carriages a tremendous shouting began to be heard. It was upon the quay itself now that the hats were waving over the serried heads of the crowd. Six of the imperial outriders, in green liveries and wearing round caps over the edge of which dangled the ends of large gold tassels, made their appearance upon the bridge. Then at last the Empress’s carriage came in sight. It was drawn by eight horses. At each of its four corners was a magnificent lamp. Large and round and constructed almost entirely of glass, the coach resembled a huge crystal casket with golden settings mounted upon golden wheels. Inside it, swathed in a cloud of snowy lace, could clearly be distinguished the rosy face of the Prince Imperial, carried upon the knees of the Governess of the Children of France, by whose side was seated the nurse, a handsome broad-chested Burgundian. A short distance behind, following a group of mounted equerries, came the Emperor’s carriage, which also was drawn by eight horses, and was equally as magnificent as the little prince’s. In it rode the Emperor and Empress, who bowed to the people as they passed through their midst. By the side of the two carriages rode several marshals, who, without a sign of impatience, received upon their richly decorated uniforms all the dust from the wheels.

“Just fancy if the bridge were to break down!” exclaimed Gilquin with a grin. He was fond of indulging in the most awful suppositions.

Madame Correur was frightened at the bare thought of such a thing and tried to stop him, but he persisted in dwelling on the same subject and remarked that iron bridges were never very safe, and he asserted that he had seen the platform oscillating when two carriages were driving over the middle of the bridge. What a splash there would be! he continued pleasantly, papa and mamma and baby would get such a drink as would keep them from ever wanting another! The carriages, however, rolled softly and silently over the bridge, and the

frame-work of the arch was so light with its sweeping gentle curve that they looked almost as if they were suspended in space over the river, in whose blue depths they were reflected like some strange gold fish which had been carried up by the flow of the tide. The Emperor and the Empress, feeling a little tired, had dropped their heads back upon the buttoned satin, glad to escape the crowd for a moment or two and the necessity of bowing to them. The Governess, too, had taken advantage of the stretch of empty space to raise up the little prince who had slipped down low on her knees, while the nurse leant forward and amused him by smiling at him. The whole procession was wrapt in bright sunshine. The uniforms of the men, the gay toilettes of the ladies and the trappings of the horses shone out brilliantly, and the sparkling carriages with their sheeny glitter sent tremulous beams of reflected sunlight dancing along the fronts of the dingy houses on the Quai Napoléon. In the distance, above the bridge, the colossal advertisement of the giant grey over-coat, painted on the wall of a house six stories in height and now lighted up with radiant splendour by the sun, formed a sort of back-ground to the magnificent picture of the procession.

Gilquin's eyes fell upon the over-coat just at the moment when it was towering above the two carriages.

“See!” he cried, “there's the uncle over yonder!”

A laugh ran through the surrounding crowd. Monsieur Charbonnel, who did not catch the point, wanted to have the joke explained to him, but his request was drowned in the deafening cheering and clapping of hands that just then arose from the crowd of three hundred thousand people. A mighty thrill of enthusiasm ran through the serried mass of sight-seers as the little prince, followed by the Emperor and Empress, came into sight on the middle of the bridge, a position of which they had a full and unbroken view. The men hoisted themselves up on the tips of their toes and set their little children astride across their necks, while the women cried and stammered out expressions of love for “the little darling,” and showed a heart-felt sympathy with the happiness of the imperial parents. A storm of glad shouts was still breaking from the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville; and, upon the quays, both up the river and down the river, nothing could be seen save a forest of waving arms. Handkerchiefs were waved from the windows, and men and women craned forward with glistening eyes and widely gap-

ing mouths. Away down in the distance the windows of the Ile Saint Louis, which looked like narrow streaks of charcoal, were lighted up with white gleams and evidences of life which was too far off to be clearly distinguished. The crew of boat-men in their red blouses stood up in the middle of the river, where the tide swept them along, and shouted their loudest, while the washerwomen, thrusting their bodies half out of the windows of the floating laundry, waved their naked arms about excitedly, and, in their desire to be heard, knocked their beetles till they nearly broke them.

“There, it’s all over now!” exclaimed Gilquin; “let us be off.”

The Charbonnels, however, wanted to see the end of everything. The tail of the procession—the squadrons of life-guards and cuirassiers and carbineers—was disappearing in the Rue d’Arcole. Then there came a scene of dreadful confusion. The double line of National Guards and regulars was broken through in several places and the women began to scream.

“Come along! come along!” repeated Gilquin. “We shall be crushed to death!”

When he had lifted the ladies down on to the causeway, he made them cross the road in spite of the crowd. Madame Correur and Madame Charbonnel wanted to keep near the parapet, make their way to the Pont Notre Dame and go and see what was happening on the Place du Parvis. But Gilquin would not hear of it, and he dragged them along after him. When they once more reached the little café, he pushed them sharply inside and made them sit down again at the table which they had recently left.

“What perverse creatures you are!” he cried. “Do you suppose that I want to have my feet crushed by all those crowding louts? Let’s have something to drink, shall we? We are much better off here than in the middle of all that crush. We’ve had quite enough sight-seeing. It was beginning to get a little wearisome. Well, old lady, what will you have?”

The Charbonnels, upon whom he kept his perturbing eyes fixed, began to make timid objections. They would like, they said, to see the procession leave the church. Gilquin then told them that it would be best to give the crowd time to disperse, and that he would take them to the church in a quarter of an hour’s time, if the crush was not too thick. While he was

busy ordering Jules to bring a supply of cigars and beer, Madame Correur prudently made her escape.

"Stop here and rest yourselves a little," she said to the Charbonnels. "You will find me over yonder."

She made her way to the Pont Notre Dame and then into the Rue de la Cité. But the crowd there was still so great that it took her a good quarter of an hour to reach the Rue de Constantine. She made a cut through the Rue de la Licorne and the Rue des Trois Canettes, and at last she emerged upon the Place du Parvis, after having lost at the ventilator of a suspicious house one of the flounces of her dove-coloured silk dress. The square, which was strewn with gravel and flowers, was lined with tall masts from which floated banners bearing the imperial arms. In front of the church, a vast tent-shaped porch concealed the nakedness of the stone-work with curtains of crimson velvet, ornamented with fringes and tassels of gold.

Here Madame Correur's progress was checked by a body of troops who were engaged in keeping back the crowd. In the middle of the great square, from which the people had been excluded, footmen were slowly pacing up and down by the side of the carriages which were drawn in five rows, while the coachmen sat solemnly in their seats, still holding their reins in their hands. As Madame Correur craned her head forward in the hope of finding some gap through which she could make her way, she caught sight of Du Poizat quietly smoking a cigar in one of the corners of the square in the midst of the footmen.

"Do you think you could get me in?" she asked him, when she had succeeded in attracting his attention by waving her handkerchief.

Du Poizat went and spoke to an officer, and then led Madame Correur in front of the church.

"If you'll take my advice," he said to her, "you'll stay here with me. It's perfectly packed inside. I was nearly suffocated and I came out. See, there are the colonel and Monsieur Bouchard who have given up the idea of finding room as hopeless."

She looked and saw the two men on her left, near the Rue du Cloître Notre Dame. Monsieur Bouchard was saying that he had just left his wife in charge of Monsieur d'Escorailles who had an excellent seat for a lady at his disposal, while the colonel's chief regret seemed to be that he was not able to explain the ceremony to his son Auguste.

"I should have liked to show him the famous vase," he said. "It is, as you know, the genuine vase of Saint Louis, a vase of copper chased and ornamented with niello work in the most perfect Persian manner. It is a relic of the times of the Crusades, and has been used at the christenings of all our kings."

"Did you see all the insignia?" Monsieur Bouchard asked of Du Poizat.

"Yes," replied the latter. "Madame de Llorentz was carrying the 'chérmeau'."

Then he began to enter into details. The "chérmeau" was the christening-cap, a fact of which neither of the men had been aware. Du Poizat then went on to enumerate the insignia of the Prince Imperial, the "chérmeau," the candle and the salt-cellar; and then the insignia of the god-father and god-mother, the basin, the ewer and the towel, which were all carried by the ladies-in-waiting. Then there was also the little prince's mantle, a most magnificent and wonderful mantle, which was hung over a chair near the font.

"Isn't there really the smallest corner where I could squeeze myself?" cried Madame Correur, whom all these details had worked up into a fever of curiosity.

Then they told her of all the great state bodies and high officials and innumerable deputations which they had seen pass by. It was an almost endless procession, they said; the Diplomatic body, the Senate, the Corps Législatif, the Council of State, the Supreme Court, the Exchequer Court, the Appeal Court, the Tribunals of Commerce and of First Instance; to say nothing of the ministers, the prefects, the mayors and their deputies, the academicians, the superior officers, and a host of others, including even delegates from the Israelitish and Protestant consistories.

"Oh! what a splendid sight it must have been!" Madame Correur exclaimed with a sigh.

Du Poizat shrugged his shoulders. He was in a very bad humour. All these people bored him, he said, and he seemed wearied by the length of the ceremony. How much longer would they be? he wondered. They had sung the *Veni Creator* and had censed themselves and walked about and saluted each other. Surely the child must be christened by this time! Monsieur Bouchard and the colonel manifested greater patience and examined the decorated windows of the square; then, as a

sudden peal of the bells shook the towers, they turned their heads and blinked their nervous eyes uneasily at their proximity to the huge church whose skiey summit they could not even discern. Auguste had slipt towards the porch, and Madame Correur followed him. But when she reached the great door, which was thrown fully open, the magnificent sight she beheld kept her rooted to the ground.

Through the two great curtains she beheld the vast church spreading itself out like a vision of some superhuman temple. The vaulted arches, of a soft blue, were spangled with stars. Round this wondrous firmament countless crystals gleamed with mystic corruscations like fiery jewels. On all sides from the lofty pillars hung drapery of crimson velvet, which still further darkened the usual dim light of the nave. In the midst of this roseate twilight there blazed a huge cluster of tapers; thousands of tapers, crowded so closely together that they seemed like a great sun flaming out in the midst of a star-strewn firmament. This blazing glory was the altar, which had been erected upon a platform in the centre of the transept. Thrones were placed at the right and left of it. Over the higher of the two thrones, upon a great canopy of velvet lined with ermine, was worked an enormous bird with snowy white breast and purple wings. The church was filled with a glittering crowd, bright with flashing gold and sparkling jewels. Near the altar in the distance the clergy and the bishops, with their mitres and croziers, formed a gleaming aureole, and seemed to afford a glimpse of the glories of heaven. Around the rails of the altar were ranged princes and princesses and great dignitaries in sovereign pomp and circumstance. Further away, in the tiers of seats which had been constructed in the arms of the transept, were seated the Diplomatic body and the Senate, on the right; and the Corps Législatif and the Council of State on the left; while the rest of the nave was crowded with representative bodies of all kinds; and, up above in the galleries, the bright toilettes of the ladies showed a mass of gay colour. The whole church was flooded with a roseate haze, and the rows of heads in every direction were dyed with the pink tints of painted porcelain. The dresses of satin and silk and velvet glowed with a deeper tone as though they were just going to break out into a blaze. All the vast church seemed to be basking in the glow of some mystic furnace.

Then Madame Correur saw an assistant master of the cere-

monies advance up the middle of the choir, where he cried out energetically three times: "Long live the Prince Imperial! Long live the Prince Imperial! Long live the Prince Imperial!"

Then as the lofty arches shook with a mighty shout, Madame Correur could see the Emperor standing up over the heads of the crowd. He stood out black and distinct against the back-ground of sheeny gold which the Bishops lit up behind him. He then presented to the people the Prince Imperial, who seemed like a bundle of white lace, and whom he held up very high in his up-stretched arms.

Then a beadle suddenly motioned to Madame Correur to retire. She took a couple of steps backwards, and in a moment there was nothing before her eyes except the curtain that hung across the porch. The splendid vision had disappeared. The bright daylight made her eyes blink, and she stood confused and speechless, half fancying that she had been gazing upon some old picture like those in the Louvre, with men and women gleaming in purple and gold, people of a past-away time and quite unlike those that were then to be met in the streets.

"Don't stop there," Du Poizat said to her, and he led her back to where the colonel and Monsieur Bouchard were still standing.

The gentlemen were now discussing the floods, which had caused terrible destruction in the valleys of the Rhône and the Loire. Thousands of families had been rendered homeless. The subscriptions which had been opened everywhere had not provided sufficient funds for the relief of so great distress. The Emperor had exhibited the most admirable courage and generosity. At Lyons he had been seen fording the low parts of the town which had been submerged, and at Tours he had spent three hours in rowing in a boat through the inundated streets, everywhere giving money lavishly.

"Ah, listen!" interrupted the colonel.

The notes of the organ were pealing through the church, and the sound of a sonorous chant rolled through the porch, the curtains of which swayed about with the enormous volume of sound.

"It is the *Te Deum!*!" exclaimed Monsieur Bouchard.

Du Poizat breathed a sigh of relief. They were getting to an end at last! Monsieur Bouchard, however, informed him that the registers had yet to be signed, and, after that was done, the Cardinal-Legate would have to give the pontifical blessing. Some of the congregation, however, were already

beginning to leave the church. Rougon was one of the first to appear, having on his arm a lady of slight build, with a sallow complexion and very plainly dressed. They were accompanied by an official personage wearing the dress of a President of an Appeal Court.

“Who are those?” asked Madame Correur.

Du Poizat told her their names. Monsieur Beulin-d’Orchère had become acquainted with Rougon some time before the Coup d’Etat, and had manifested much esteem for him since that period, without, however, attempting to establish a close intimacy with him. Mademoiselle Véronique, his sister, lived with him in a house in the Rue Garancière, which she seldom left except to go and hear low mass at Saint Sulpice’s.

“Ah!” said the colonel, lowering his voice, “that is the wife for Rougon!”

“Exactly,” assented Monsieur Bouchard. “She has got a suitable fortune; her family is good, and she is a steady-going woman of large experience. He will never find a wife more fitted for him.”

Du Poizat, however, protested against this. The lady, he said, was as over-ripe as a forgotten medlar. She was at least thirty-six years of age, and she looked forty. A nice broom-handle she would be for a man to take into his bed! A devotee who would always have her hair brushed quite smooth and smug! She looked as faded and as washed-out as though she had been soaking her head in holy water for the last six months.

“You are a young man,” said the head-clerk, gravely. “Rougon ought to make a marriage based upon reason. I myself married for love, but that is a plan which does not succeed with everyone.”

“I don’t apprehend the least danger from the lady herself,” continued Du Poizat; “it’s Beulin-d’Orchère’s look that alarms me. He’s got a regular dog’s jaw. Just look at him with that heavy muzzle of his and that forest of woolly hair, without a single silver thread, in spite of his fifty years. What’s he thinking about, I wonder? Why does he still drive his sister into Rougon’s arms now that our friend is no longer in favour?”

Monsieur Bouchard and the colonel kept silence, and exchanged an uneasy glance. Was “the dog,” as the ex-sub-prefect called him, going to make Rougon his own prey?

“It is a good thing to have the judicial bench on one’s side,” said Madame Correur, slowly.

Rougon conducted Mademoiselle Véronique to her carriage, and then, before she had got into it, he bowed to her. Just at this moment the fair Clorinde came out of the church, leaning upon Delestang's arm. Her face assumed a grave expression, and she cast a fiery glance at the tall sallow young woman, the door of whose carriage Rougon gallantly closed, notwithstanding his senatorial uniform. As soon as the carriage drove off, Clorinde dropped Delestang's arm, and stepped straight up to Rougon, breaking out into her old gay laugh.

"I have lost my mother!" she said to him, merrily. "She has been carried off somewhere in the crowd. Will you give me a little corner in your brougham, eh?"

Delestang, who had intended offering to take her home, appeared very much annoyed. Clorinde was wearing a dress of orange silk, looped up with such showy flowers that the footmen stared at her. Rougon granted her request, but they had to wait for the brougham for another ten minutes. They all remained standing where they were, even Delestang, whose carriage was in the first row, only a yard or two away. In the meanwhile the congregation continued to leave the church Monsieur Kahn and Monsieur Béjuin, who were passing, came up and joined the group. As Rougon gave but a weak shake of his hand, and looked somewhat ill at ease, Monsieur Kahn asked with anxious concern :

"Aren't you feeling well?"

"Oh, yes," he answered, "but all those lights inside there have rather dazed me."

He was silent for a moment, and then he continued in low tones :

"It was a splendid sight. I have never seen such an expression of happiness upon a man's face before."

He was speaking of the Emperor, and, as he spoke, he spread out his arms with a sweeping gesture, and blinked his eyes as though he were recalling to his mind the scene in the church. The others all kept silence. They made up quite a little group there, as they stood in a corner of the square. In front of them the stream of people leaving the church grew gradually thicker ; there were judges in their robes, officers and functionaries in full-dress uniform, a crowd of belaced and bedizened and decorated personages who trod over the flowers, with which the square was strewn, in the midst of the cries of the footmen and the rolling of the carriage-wheels. The apogee glory of the

Empire blazed in the crimson of the setting sun ; and the towers of Notre Dame, all roseate and musical, seemed to speak of the height of peace and greatness to which the future reign of the child who had been baptized beneath their shadow would some day attain. But in the group of friends, the splendour of the ceremony, the pealing bells, the streaming banners, and the enthusiasm of the city only aroused feelings of envy of the happy ones in office. For the first time Rougon felt the full weight of the disfavour into which he had fallen. His face was very pale, and, as he stood there deep in thought, he envied the Emperor.

“ Well, geod afternoon ; I’m off ! I can’t stand this any longer ! ” exclaimed Du Poizat, shaking hands with the others.

“ What’s the matter with you to-day ? ” asked the colonel, “ you seem very fractious.”

The sub-prefect quietly replied, as he went away :

“ Well, you can scarcely expect me to be in very high spirits. I saw in the ‘Moniteur’ this morning that that ass of a Campenon has been appointed to the prefecture which was promised to me.”

The rest of the group looked at each other. Du Poizat was quite right. They had no share in the general fête. They were all being left out in the cold. Since the birth of the prince, Rougon had promised them a perfect shower of blessings for the day of the christening. Monsieur Kahn was to have had his concession ; the colonel was to have had a commander’s cross, and Madame Correur was to have had the five or six tobacco-agencies for which she had asked. And now they were all standing there together in a corner of the square empty-handed. They cast such a distressful and reproachful look upon Rougon, that the latter shrugged his shoulders painfully. His brougham now at last drew up, and he hastily pushed Clorinde inside, then got in himself, and closed the door after him with a bang, without saying a word.

“ There’s Marsy under the porch,” said Monsieur Kahn, as he went off with Monsieur Béjuin. “ How stuck up he looks ! Don’t look at him ; it would only give him the opportunity of cutting us.”

Delestang had hastily got into his carriage in order to follow the brougham. Monsieur Bouchard waited for his wife, and when the church was empty he was surprised at not seeing her appear ; however, he went off with the colonel, who had

grown equally tired of waiting for his son Auguste. Madame Correur accepted the escort of a lieutenant of dragoons, who came from her own part of France, and who was to some extent indebted to her for his commission.

In the brougham, Clorinde was prattling enthusiastically about the ceremony that had just taken place; while Rougon leaned back with half closed eyes and listened to her. She had seen the Easter solemnities at Rome, she told him, but they were not finer than what she had just beheld. She said that, for her, religion consisted of a vision of heaven with God the Father seated on His throne like a glittering sun in the midst of the glory of His encircling angels, and surrounded by a host of lovely youths and maidens. Then she abruptly changed the subject and asked :

“Are you going to the banquet which the city is giving to their majesties to-night? It will be a magnificent sight.”

She had got an invitation herself. She was going to wear a rose-coloured dress, looped up with forget-me-nots. Monsieur de Plouguern was going to take her, as her mother would not go out at night on account of the headaches to which she was subject. However she suddenly changed her subject again, asking abruptly :

“Who was that judge you were with just now?”

Rougon opened his eyes, and said all in a breath: “Monsieur Beulin-d’Orchère, fifty years of age, of a legal family, began as public prosecutor’s assessor at Montrésor, was next public prosecutor at Orléans, advocate-general at Rouen, a member of a mixed commission in 1852, and then came to Paris as Councillor of the Appeal Court, of which he is now the President. Oh! I was forgetting; he approved of the decree of the twenty-second of January, 1852, confiscating the property of the Orléans family. There, are you satisfied?”

Clorinde began to laugh. He was making fun of her, she said, just because she asked for information; but there was nothing foolish—was there?—in asking about people one might happen to meet. She did not say a word about Mademoiselle Beulin-d’Orchère. She began again to talk about the banquet at the Hôtel de Ville. The grand gallery was going to be decorated with unheard of magnificence, and a band would play the whole time the guests were dining. Ah! France was truly a great country! Nowhere, neither in England, nor in Germany, nor in Spain, nor in Italy, had she seen such wonderful

balls or such brilliant fêtes. She had quite made up her mind now, she said, while her face was lighted up with a glow of admiration ; she would be a Frenchwoman.

“ Oh, look ! ” she cried ; “ there are some soldiers there ! ”

The brougham, which had driven along the Rue de la Cité, was now checked at the end of the Pont Notre Dame by the presence of a regiment which was marching back to its quarters. It was one of the line. The soldiers were hastening along after each other like so many sheep, and the trees which were planted along the roadside caused their progress to be somewhat irregular. They had been on duty keeping the line for the procession. Their faces were scorched by the hot afternoon-sun, their feet were white with dust, and their backs bent beneath the weight of their knapsacks and rifles. They were so tired and weary that they looked half-dazed and confused amid the jostling of the crowd.

“ I adore the French army,” said Clorinde, enthusiastically, bending forward to get a better view.

Rougon roused himself and looked out of the window. It was the power of the Empire that was passing there before him in the dust of the street. Gradually an accumulation of carriages blocked up the bridge, but the coachmen waited respectfully for the soldiers to pass on, and distinguished personages in gay uniforms gazed out from the windows of the carriages and smiled vaguely as they looked sympathisingly at the little soldiers who were so worn out with their long day’s work.

“ Do you see those in the rear ? ” exclaimed Clorinde. “ There is a whole row of them who haven’t got any hair on their faces yet. How nice they look ! ”

Then, in her enthusiasm, she began to kiss her hands to the soldiers from the back of the brougham. She lay back a little so that she should not be seen. Rougon smiled in a paternal manner. He, too, had just felt a thrill of pleasure, the first he had felt during the whole day.

“ What’s going on here ? ” he exclaimed, when the brougham had at last been able to turn the corner of the quay.

A considerable crowd had formed upon the footway and in the road, and the brougham had to stop again. A voice was heard to say :

“ It is a drunken man who has insulted the soldiers. The police have just taken him into custody.”

Then, as the crowd broke up, Rougon caught sight of Gil-

quin, dead-drunk, and grasped by the shoulders by a couple of policemen. His yellow duck clothes were torn, and his naked flesh showed through the rents. But he still retained his garrulous joviality, in spite of his drooping moustache and scarlet face. He addressed the policemen in the most friendly fashion and called them by endearing names. He told them that he had been spending the afternoon quietly in the neighbourhood in the company of some very rich people, and he referred them for inquiries to the Palais Royal theatre, where Monsieur and Madame Charbonnel, who had gone to see *Les Dragées du Baptême*, would readily confirm his statement.

“Let me go, my jokers!” he cried, suddenly stiffening himself. “Confound it all, the café is close at hand; come with me there, if you don’t believe me. The soldiers insulted me. There was a little scamp who laughed at me, and I shut him up. But to insult the French army! Never! Just you mention the name of Théodore to the Emperor and see what he says. Ah! you’re a nice set, you are!”

The crowd laughed with amusement. The two imperturbable policemen declined to be moved by Gilquin’s protestations, and they dragged him slowly along towards the Rue Saint Martin, in which could be seen the distant gleam of the red lamp of a police-station. Rougon had hastily thrown himself back in his brougham, but Gilquin suddenly caught sight of him as he raised his head. Then, drunk though he was, he assumed an expression of solemnity, and casting a glance at Rougon, accompanied by a wink, he said, so that the latter might hear him:

“Well, well, my friends: I might make a public exposure if I liked, but I’ve too much self-respect. Ah, you wouldn’t lay your paws upon Théodore in this way if he rushed about with princesses as a citizen of my acquaintance does. All the same, however, I have worked with great people, and cleverly, too, though I don’t want to boast about it, and I never asked for a big reward. But I have the satisfaction of knowing my own worth, and that consoles me for other people’s meanness. Ah, confound it, are friends no longer friends?”

His voice was growing thick with emotion and was broken with hiccoughs. Rougon quietly beckoned to a man wearing a closely buttoned coat, whom he saw standing near his brougham, and, after having whispered a few words to him, he gave him Gilquin’s address, 17 Rue Virginie, Grenelle. The man then stepped up to the constables as though he were going to help

them to hold the drunkard who had begun to struggle, and the crowd was presently greatly surprised to see the policemen turn to the left and bundle Gilquin into a cab, the driver of which, after receiving an order, drove off along the Quai de la Mégisserie. Gilquin, however, thrust his huge unkempt head from the window, and, breaking into a burst of triumphant laughter, he shouted out :

“ Long live the Republic ! ”

When the crowd had dispersed, the quays resumed their wonted tranquillity. Paris, wearied with its enthusiasm, had gone off to dine. The three hundred thousand sight-seers, who had struggled and crowded there, were now invading the restaurants by the water-side and in the district of the Temple. Visitors from the country were pacing the deserted pavements, quite knocked up and not knowing where to go to dine. In the floating laundry the washerwomen were finishing their work. A last ray of sunlight was still gilding the towers of Notre Dame, which reared their now silent forms above the houses which were already grey with shadow. Through the slight mist that was rising from the Seine, nothing could be distinguished among the grey mass of houses, on the Ile Saint Louis, save the giant great-coat ; that colossal advertisement seemingly poised in the heavens and looking like the garment of a Titan, whose body had been consumed by Jove’s thunderbolts.

CHAPTER V.

ONE morning towards eleven o'clock, Clorinde called at Rougon's house in the Rue Marbeuf. She was on her way back from the Bois, and a groom held her horse at the door. She went straight into the garden, turned to the left, and halted in front of the open window of the study in which the great man was at work.

"Ah! I've taken you by surprise!" she exclaimed.

Rougon raised his head sharply. The girl stood laughing in the warm June sunshine. Her riding-habit of heavy blue cloth made her seem taller. She was carrying its long train over her right arm, and her closely clinging corsage fitted her shoulders and breast and hips like a skin. She wore linen wristbands and collar, and beneath the latter was tied a little bow of blue silk. She looked very smart and pert with her hair brushed back and her man's hat; and the bright light of the sun passing through her gauze veil cast a bluish tint upon her brow.

"Hallo! is that you?" cried Rougon, hastening up to her. "But come in!"

"No, no," she said; "don't disturb yourself, I only just want to speak to you for a moment. My mother will be expecting me back to breakfast."

This was the third time that she had come in this way to Rougon's house in contravention of all the proprieties. She made a point, however, of remaining in the garden; and upon the other two occasions, as upon this one, she had come in her riding-habit, a costume which seemed to confer masculine liberties upon her, its long train forming, to her mind, quite a sufficient protection.

"I have come to beg," she said. "I want you to buy some lottery tickets. We are getting up a lottery for the benefit of some poor young girls."

"Oh, indeed; but come in, and then you can tell me all about it."

She was holding her whip in her hand, a slight delicate whip with a little silver handle. She began to laugh again, striking her skirt gently with her whip.

“Oh, I’ve told you all there is to tell,” she said. “You must take some tickets. That’s all I came for. I’ve been looking for you for the last three days without being able to come across you, and the drawing takes place to-morrow.”

Then, as she took a little case out of her pocket, she asked :

“How many tickets would you like?”

“Not one, if you won’t come in!” Rougon cried.

Then he continued playfully :

“We can’t transact business at the window, you know, and I’m not going to hand you money out as though you were some beggar-woman.”

“Oh, I don’t object, as long as I get it.”

But Rougon remained firm. She looked at him for a moment in silence, and then she continued :

“If I come in, will you promise to take ten tickets? They are ten francs each.”

She did not make up her mind to go in without some little further hesitation, and she threw a hasty glance round the garden. There was a gardener at work upon his knees planting a bed of geraniums. Then she smiled slightly and moved towards the little flight of three steps upon which the folding-window of the study opened. Rougon held out his hand to her and drew her into the middle of the room.

“Are you afraid that I shall eat you up?” he asked her. “You know very well that I am the most submissive of your slaves. What are you frightened of?”

She was still tapping her skirts lightly with her whip.

“I! I’m not afraid of anything,” she said, calmly.

Then she laid her whip upon a couch and again began to fumble in her little case.

“You’ll take ten, won’t you?”

“I will take twenty, if you wish it,” he replied: “but do, please, sit down and let us have a little chat. You surely don’t want to be off at once.”

“Well, then, it shall be a ticket a minute. If I stay for quarter of an hour, you will have to take fifteen tickets, and if I stay twenty minutes, you will have to take twenty tickets, and so on as long as I stay. Is that agreed?”

They laughed merrily over this arrangement, and Clorinde then

sat down in an easy-chair standing in the recess of the window which still remained open. Rougon, on his side, resumed his seat in front of his table to put her at her ease. Then they began to talk, taking the house for their first subject. Clorinde glanced out of the window and remarked that the garden was rather small, but very lovely, with its central lawn and clumps of green trees. Then Rougon began to describe to her the plan of the house. On the ground-floor, he said, were his study, a large drawing-room and a small one and a very handsome dining-room. On the first-flooor there were seven bedrooms, and as many upon the second. Although to some people the house might seem a very small one, it was much too big for him, he declared. At the time when the Emperor presented it to him, he was engaged to marry a widow, chosen by His Majesty himself ; but the lady had died, and he should remain a bachelor now.

“Why ?” asked Clorinde, looking him straight in the face.

“Oh ! I’ve other things to do now than to think of getting married. When a man gets to my age, he doesn’t think about taking a wife.”

“Don’t be so affected,” replied Clorinde, with a shrug of her shoulders.

They had become intimate enough to talk very freely together. Clorinde said that she should like to see Rougon fonder of the pleasures of life, but he defended himself, and told her about his early days, and of the years he had spent in bare rooms, into which never even a laundress entered, he said with a laugh. Then she began to question him about his mistresses with childish curiosity. She was sure, she said, that he had had some. He could not deny, for instance, his intimacy with a lady whom all Paris knew and who, when she left him, had gone to settle down in the country. But Rougon only shrugged his shoulders. Petticoats were very little in his way, he said. Sometimes, indeed, his blood surged hotly and then—well, then he was like all other men, and he would break down a partition-wall with his shoulders to reach a bedroom. Such trifles as doors annoyed him at those times ; but, when it was all over, he was perfectly calm again.

“No ! no wife for me !” he cried, though his eyes already brightened with a fiery gleam at the sight of Clorinde’s careless attitude.

A peculiar smile played upon the young girl’s lips as she lay

back in her chair. There was an expression of soft languor upon her face, and her bosom slightly heaved. When she replied, she exaggerated her Italian accent and spoke in a sort of singing voice.

“Nonsense, my friend ; you adore us, I know. Will you bet that you aren’t married this time next year ?”

She was really provoking, so certain did she seem to be of conquering. For some time past she had been calmly offering herself to Rougon. She now no longer attempted to disguise her snares and the clever way in which she had worked upon him before laying siege to his desires. She considered that he was now sufficiently conquered for her to openly bring the matter to an issue. It was a real duel that was going on between them, and although the conditions of the combat were not mentioned in actual words, there were unmistakable confessions in their glances and expressions. When they looked at each other they could not keep from smiling. Clorinde set her eyes upon her goal and went straight for it, with a haughty boldness, feeling sure of surrendering nothing more than she was willing to surrender. Rougon, who was completely infatuated with the beautiful girl, played a wily game, and meant merely to make her his mistress and then to cast her off so as to prove his superiority over her. Their pride was engaged in the struggle quite as much as their passions.

“With us,” Clorinde said in her low, soft tones, “love is the great business of life. Young girls of thirteen have their lovers. For myself, I have travelled about so much, that I’ve almost become a man. But if you could only have seen mamma when she was young ! She never used to leave her room. She was so lovely that people came from long distances to see her. There was a count who stayed expressly at Milan for six months without ever succeeding in catching sight of her hair even. The Italian women are very different from French women, who are always chattering and rushing up and down. An Italian woman remains on the bosom of the man she has chosen. But I have travelled about so much, that I really don’t know whether I haven’t lost that instinct or not, still I think that I could love very strongly ; ah, yes, with all my heart and soul.”

She had let her eyelids gradually sink down, and her face shone with a voluptuous ecstasy. While she was speaking, Rougon had left his table as though he had been attracted by some force which he could not withstand, and his hands were

trembling. But when he got close to Clorinde, the girl opened her eyes widely again and looked at him quite tranquilly. Then she glanced at the clock and said with a smile :

“This makes ten tickets.”

“Ten tickets ! what do you mean ?” asked Rougon, quite confused.

Then, when he recovered his calmness again, she burst out into a peal of laughter. It delighted her to bewitch him and intoxicate him in this way, and then, when he opened his arms to clasp her within them, to elude him with a laugh. She seemed in high glee. Rougon suddenly turned very pale and cast a furious glance at her, which only served to increase her merriment.

“Well I think I’d better be off now,” she said. “You’re not polite enough for ladies’ society. No, really seriously, my mother will be expecting me for breakfast.”

Rougon had now resumed his paternal manner, though, when the girl turned her head away, there still shone a fiery gleam in his grey eyes underneath their heavy lids ; and his glance swept over her with the expression of a man resolved to obtain his will. He told her that she must try and spare him another five minutes. He had got so tired of the work he was doing when she came in, he said ; it was a report to be presented to the Senate on certain petitions. Then he began to talk to her about the Empress, for whom she professed the most enthusiastic devotion. The Empress had been at Biarritz for the last week. Then the young girl threw herself down again in the arm-chair and began an endless string of chatter. She knew Biarritz very well, she said. She had once spent a season there, before it became a fashionable watering-place. She was afraid that she would not be able to get there again before the court left. Then she went on to describe a meeting of the Academy to which Monsieur de Plouguern had taken her the previous day. An author had been admitted as a member, and she made many jokes at the expense of his baldness. She had a horror of books, she said. If ever she tried to read, she had to go off to bed, suffering from terrible nervous attacks. She could not understand what she read. When Rougon told her that the author who had been received into the Academy on the previous day was an enemy of the Emperor’s and that his discourse swarmed with abominable allusions, she seemed quite astounded.

“And he looked such a nice man !” she declared.

Then Rougon, in his turn, began to inveigh against books. A novel had just been published, he said, which had aroused his utmost indignation. It was a work of the most depraved imagination ; which, while it affected to scrupulously pourtray the exact truth, dragged the reader on through all the wild fancies of a hysterical woman.* The word hysterical seemed to please him, for he repeated it three times ; but when Clorinde asked him to explain what he meant by it, he refused to answer, suddenly becoming very prudish.

“Everything may be said,” he continued, “only there is a fitting way of saying it. In administrative matters, for instance, we are frequently obliged to tackle very delicate subjects. I have read, for example, reports upon a certain class of women—you know what I mean—well, they have contained the most minute details, but they have been expressed in a clear, simple, and straightforward style, and there was nothing whatever that was unchaste or impure about the document. But our novelists of to-day have adopted a style which is full of lubricity, and a manner of describing things which makes it appear as if they were actually going on before you. The writers call that art. To me it seems to be simply indecency and bad taste.”

Then he muttered the word “pornography,” and went on to speak of the Marquis de Sade, whom, by the way, he had never read. While he was talking, he manœuvred cleverly to get behind Clorinde’s chair without her being aware of it. The girl was gazing into the air with an expression of abstraction.

“Oh, as for novels,” she murmured, “I have never even opened one. They are all a pack of silly falsehoods. You don’t know *Leonora, the gipsy*, do you? It is a pretty book. I read it in Italian when I was quite little. It is about a young girl who ends by marrying a lord. She is captured by brigands to begin with—”

A slight grating sound behind her now made her turn her head with a sudden start.

“What are you doing there?” she asked.

“I am pulling the blind down,” Rougon replied. “I was afraid the sun was disturbing you.”

The girl was, indeed, sitting in a flood of sun-light, and the floating motes gilded her closely clinging corsage with a soft luminous haze.

* An allusion to M. Flaubert’s “Madame Bovary.”—Trans.

"Please leave the blind alone," she cried, "I love the sun. I feel as though I were in a warm bath."

Then, with an uneasy expression, she raised herself in her chair and looked out into the garden to see if the gardener was still there. When she saw him kneeling down at the other side of the bed with the back of his blue blouse turned towards them, she resumed her reclining attitude again, smiling, and easy once more. Rougon, who had followed the direction of her eyes, left the blind as it was, and the girl began to banter him. He was just like an owl, she said, to be so fond of darkness. But he showed no resentment, and he began to pace up and down the middle of the room without exhibiting the least sign of vexation. He swayed his great body about like a bear contemplating some wily act of treachery.

"Oh, come and look here," he said, pointing to a large photograph, "you haven't seen my last portrait, have you?"

She stretched herself further back in her chair, and went on smiling as she replied :

"I can see it very well from here; and, besides, you have shown it to me before."

Rougon was not yet discouraged. He went and drew down the blind of the other window, and he invented several reasons to induce the young girl to go into the shady corner which he had made by doing so. She would be much more comfortable there, he told her. But Clorinde, despising this obvious snare, made no reply, and merely shook her head. Then Rougon, as he saw that she had guessed his purpose, came and stood in front of her; and, dropping all attempts at stratagem, he said to her straightforwardly :

"Oh, by the way, I want to show you my new horse, Monarque. You know that I have been making an exchange. You are fond of horses, and you shall come and tell me what you think of him."

But the girl still refused to move. Then Rougon began to press her. The stable, he said, was only a couple of yards away. It wouldn't take her more than five minutes at the most. She still continued to refuse, however, and then Rougon murmured with a touch of scorn in his voice :

"Ah! you are afraid!"

The young girl started up, as though she had received a cut from a whip. All her smiling expression had left her and she was a little pale.

“ Let us go and look at Monarque,” she said quietly.

She gathered up the train of her riding-habit over her left arm, and fixed her eyes keenly upon Rougon’s. For a moment or two, they remained gazing at each other so searchingly that they seemed to be reading each other’s thoughts. It was a challenge given and accepted, without any pretence of concealment. As Clorinde led the way down the steps, Rougon buttoned, with a mechanical action, the house-coat which he was wearing. But the girl had only taken a step or two along the garden-walk when she stopped.

“ Wait a moment,” she said.

She went back into the room, and when she returned, she was lightly holding in her fingers her riding-whip, which she had left behind the cushion of the couch. Rougon gave a hasty glance at the whip, and then he slowly raised his eyes to Clorinde’s face. The girl was smiling again, and she resumed her position in front of him.

The stable was at the end of the garden, on the right. As they past the gardener, the man was gathering up his tools and preparing to go away. Rougon looked at his watch. It was five minutes past eleven ; the groom would have gone away to breakfast. Then, bareheaded in the blazing sun, he followed Clorinde, who was stepping quietly along, giving the green trees gentle taps with her riding-whip, as she went past them. Neither of them spoke a word. Clorinde did not even turn her head round. When they got to the stable, she stood till Rougon opened the door, and then she went inside, in front of him. The door, which Rougon swung violently back, closed noisily, and Clorinde still smiled, her face wearing an open expression, in which pride and confidence were clearly to be read.

The stable was a small and common-place one, with four oak stalls. Although the slabs had been washed that morning, and the racks and mangers and other wood-work were kept in a scrupulously clean condition, there was a strong scent about the place, and the atmosphere was warm and damp, like that of a Turkish bath. The stable was lighted by two round sky-lights, but these only allowed a pale glimmer to fall from the ceiling, and the corners were wrapt in gloom. Clorinde, having just left the bright day-light of the garden, could at first distinguish nothing at all ; but she kept still, and did not open the door again for fear Rougon should think she was alarmed. Only two

of the stalls were occupied. The horses snorted and turned their heads.

"This is the one, isn't it?" she asked, when her eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom. "He looks a very nice animal."

She patted the horse gently, and then she slipped inside the stall, and began to stroke the animal without showing the least sign of fear. She wanted to see his head, she said; and when she had made her way right to the far end of the stall, Rougon could hear her kissing the horse's nose. The sound of the kisses excited him.

"Come back, I beg you!" he cried. "If he were to step on one side, you would be crushed to death!"

But the girl only laughed and kissed the horse more affectionately than before, and spoke to him caressingly, while the silky skin of the animal, who seemed quite delighted with this unexpected fondling, fairly quivered with pleasure. Then Clorinde came out of the stall again. She said that she loved horses, and that they always made friends with her, and never tried to hurt her, even when she teased them. She knew how to manage them. Some of them were very skittish, but this one seemed very steady and quiet. Then she stooped down behind the horse, and lifted up one of its hoofs in her hands and examined the shoe. The animal stood quite quiet and still.

Rougon gazed at her stooping down before him. As she bent forward, her hips distended the great bunch of her skirts; but he said nothing, feeling a sudden thrill of timidity, though his blood was surging hotly. Presently he stooped down too. Clorinde felt a slight touch under her arm-pits, but so slight that she took no notice of it, but went on examining the horse's shoe. Rougon breathed heavily, and then suddenly thrust his arms out further. But the young girl did not even start; she seemed as though she had been expecting it. She let the horse's hoof drop, and then, without even turning round, she said:

"What is the matter with you? What has come over you?"

Then Rougon tried to seize her round the waist, but the girl rapped his knuckles smartly and cried:

"No, no; none of your tricks, please. I'm like the horses, I'm very ticklish."

She laughed, and pretended not to have understood his mean-

ing. When she felt his warm breath upon the nape of her neck, she jumped up as smartly as though she had been shot up by a steel spring, and she made her escape from him, and went and stationed herself against the wall in front of the stalls. Rougon followed her with outstretched hands and tried to grasp her anywhere he could. But she used the train of her riding-habit, which she was holding over her left arm, as a shield to protect herself with ; while in her uplifted right hand she held her whip. Rougon's lips were trembling, but he did not say a word ; while Clorinde, seeming quite at her ease, went on talking freely.

" You can't touch me, you'll see," she said. " When I was younger, I used to have fencing-lessons. I'm sorry I did not go on with them. Look out for your fingers ! There ! what did I tell you ? "

She seemed to be only in fun. She did not strike Rougon severely, but merely playfully lashed at him when he put his hands too far forward. She was so quick in her defence that he could not even touch her dress. At first he had tried to seize her by the shoulders, but after she had twice beaten him off with her whip, he attempted to grasp her waist. Beaten off again, he had now treacherously stooped down, intending to seize the girl's knees, but she was too quick for him, and she showered down upon him a rain of little taps which forced him to rise up again. It was a perfect hail that came clattering down upon him on all sides.

Rougon's skin was tingling all over, and he stepped back for a moment. His face was very red, and drops of perspiration were beginning to trickle down his brow. The strong scent of the stable was intoxicating his brain, and the dusky gloom, warm with animal emanations, excited him to risk everything. Then his manner changed, and he threw himself roughly upon Clorinde, and tried to seize her by making sudden springs at her. But the young girl, although still continuing to smile and talk, no longer gave her assailant gentle friendly taps, but struck him smart single blows of increasing severity. She looked very beautiful with her skirts drawn tightly across her legs and her lissom figure moving flexibly in her closely-clinging corsage. She was like a sinuous, bluish-black serpent, and as she raised her arm to strike, throwing her head back slightly at the same time, her throat and breast formed a charming curve.

"Well, now," she exclaimed, with a laugh, "have you had enough? You'll be the first to tire, I think, my friend."

But she stopped talking now. Rougon, wild with desire, his eyes glaring fiercely, and his face now crimson, rushed forward at her with the hot panting breath of a charging bull. A fierce light glistened in Clorinde's eyes, and she seemed to revel in the whipping she was administering to her assailant. Keeping a strict silence, she left her position by the wall and advanced haughtily into the middle of the stable. She wheeled round and round, and slashed about her with her whip and kept Rougon from touching her, cutting him across his legs, his arms, his chest, and his shoulders; while his great form jumped and danced clumsily around her, like some huge beast beneath the trainer's lash. As she stood there slashing him with her whip, she seemed to have grown taller. There was an expression of calm pride upon her face, her cheeks were pale, and there was a slight nervous smile playing upon her lips. But without her being aware of it, Rougon was gradually driving her towards the back of the stable, towards an open door which led into a store-room where the hay and straw was kept. Then, as the girl swept back her whip, which he had made some faint attempts to seize, he seized her by the hips, and, in spite of the blows which she rained upon him, he threw her through the doorway on to the straw with such violence that he himself fell down upon it by her side. Clorinde did not utter a single cry, but with all her might she gave him a slashing cut with her whip across his face from ear to ear.

"Hussy!" he cried.

Then he broke out into a torrent of obscene language, and swore and sputtered and half-choked in his excitement. He told the girl that she had been in bed with every one—with the coachman, with the banker, with Pozzo.

"And why won't you go with me?" then he asked her.

She did not deign to make him any reply. She was now standing up again, motionless and haughtily calm as a statue, with her face very pale.

"Why won't you?" Rougon asked again. "You let me freely take hold of your bare arms. Tell me why you won't."

Her face wore a grave expression, her eyes gazed into the distance, and she seemingly scorned to notice Rougon's insulting words.

"Because—" she at last commenced.

Then she paused and looked at him.

“Marry me,” she continued, after a short interval of silence. “When you have done that, you may have all you want.”

Rougon broke out into a forced laugh, a sneering, insulting laugh, and shook his head.

“Very well then, never!” Clorinde exclaimed. “Never! do you hear? never!”

Neither of them said anything further, and they went back into the stable. The horses in the stalls turned their heads and snorted, disturbed by the sound of the struggle which they had heard behind them. The sun had just risen high enough in the sky to shine down through the skylight, and amid the gloom of the stable there appeared two golden beams. The slabs on which they fell were steaming, filling the atmosphere with a stronger odour even than before. Clorinde, who was now perfectly unruffled, again slipped up to Monarque’s head, putting her whip under her arm. She gave him two kisses on the nostrils as she said:

“Good-bye, old fellow. You, at any rate, know how to behave yourself.”

Rougon, quite crushed and ashamed, was perfectly calm now. The last cut of the whip had, as it were, appeased the cravings of his flesh. With his still quivering hands he straightened his cravat, and felt if his coat was properly buttoned. Then he carefully picked off from Clorinde’s riding-habit a few pieces of straw which had clung to it. A feeling of fear lest he should be discovered there with her now made him strain his ears and listen. Clorinde allowed him to go round her skirts without showing the slightest sign of fear, as though nothing out of the common had taken place between them. When she asked him to open the door, he obeyed her at once.

They walked quietly along through the garden. Rougon felt a slight stinging on his left cheek and dabbed it with his handkerchief. When they reached his study, Clorinde’s first glance was at the time-piece.

“That makes thirty-two tickets,” she said with a smile.

As Rougon looked at her in surprise, she broke out into a laugh, and continued:

“You had better send me off at once. The hand is moving forward. The thirty-third minute has begun. See, I’m putting the tickets on your desk.”

Rougon immediately gave her three hundred and twenty

francs. His fingers trembled slightly as he counted out the pieces of gold. It was a fine which he had inflicted upon himself. Then Clorinde, carried away by the manner in which he put down such a sum of money, stepped up to him with an adorable expression of surrender. She offered her cheek to him, and, when he had kissed it in a father-like fashion, she went off, looking quite delighted, and saying :

“ Thank you for the poor girls. I have only seven tickets now to dispose off. My godfather will take those.”

When Rougon was alone again, he sat down mechanically at his desk. He resumed his interrupted work and wrote for some minutes, carefully consulting the papers that were lying in front of him. Then he held his pen in his fingers and a grave expression came over his face as his eyes gazed, without taking notice of anything, through the open window into the garden. He again saw Clorinde’s lithe form swaying and curving near the window with soft voluptuous motions like some bluish serpent. Now he saw her gliding into the room and standing in the middle of it upon the living tail which her habit seemed to form. He saw her lips quivering as she stretched out her arms towards him ; and gradually the room seemed to be full of her presence. It pervaded everything ; the carpet, the chairs, the curtains, amidst a silence that sighed with passion, and she seemed to breathe out a penetrating perfume.

Rougon threw his pen down violently and angrily got up from his desk. Was this girl going now to prevent him working ? he cried to himself. Was he going mad that he saw things which had no existence ? he whose brain was so strong ! He recalled to his mind a woman, close to whom he had written many a time through the whole night when he was a student without even noticing her gentle breathing. He drew up the blind and opened the other window, and he established a current of air by roughly flinging open a door on the opposite side of the room, as though he were feeling suffocated. Then with the angry gestures with which he would have driven away a dangerous wasp, he tried to drive away the scent of Clorinde by flapping his handkerchief in the air. When he no longer noticed it, he took a deep breath and dabbed his face with his handkerchief to wipe away the heat which Clorinde had caused to rise there.

He could not, however, go on with the page he had commenced and he began to pace slowly about the room, from one

end to the other. As he glanced at himself in a mirror, he caught sight of a red mark on his left cheek. Clorinde's whip had only left a slight scratch behind it, and he could easily ascribe that to some trifling accident. However, although his skin showed nothing but a slight red line, his whole body burned inwardly again with the slashing cuts of the girl's whip. He hastened into a little lavatory, which was curtained off from the rest of the room, and plunged his head into a basin of water. That afforded him considerable relief. He was beginning to be afraid lest the whipping he had received from Clorinde should only sharpen his desire for her. He felt afraid to think about her till the little scratch on his cheek was quite healed ; the feverish warmth of that little spot seemed to descend and thrill his whole body.

"No ! never !" he said aloud, as he came back into his room. "It would be madness !"

He threw himself down on the couch and clenched his fists. A servant came in and told him that his breakfast was getting cold, but he still sat there, struggling with the impulses of his flesh. His stern, set face was puffed out with the contest that was waging within him ; and his bull-like neck was swollen and his muscles were strained as though he were choking, within his vitals, and without deigning to give a cry of pain, some animal that was devouring him. The battle went on for ten long minutes. He could not remember ever having felt so exhausted before ; and, when he got up, he was quite pallid and his neck was moist with perspiration.

For the next two days Rougon admitted no one to see him. He shut himself up with a pile of work. He sat up one whole night. Three times again, when his servant came into his room, he found him lying on the couch, seeming quite faint and exhausted and with a most alarming look on his face. On the evening of the second day he dressed to go to Delestang's, where he was engaged to dine. But, instead of crossing the Champs Élysées, he turned up the avenue and went into the Balbis' house. It was only six o'clock.

"Mademoiselle isn't at home," said the little servant Antonia, laughing like a black goat, as she stopped him on the staircase.

Rougon raised his voice on the chance of making himself heard, and he was hesitating about going down again when Clorinde appeared up above, bending over the balustrade.

"Come up!" she cried. "What an idiot that girl is! She never understands anything that is told her."

When Rougon reached the first floor, Clorinde took him into a small room next to her bed-chamber. It was a dressing-room, with a paper of soft blue flower-work, which she had furnished with a great mahogany desk, with all the polish worn off it, pushed against the wall, an arm-chair upholstered in leather, and a stand for portfolios. Papers were lying about, covered with a thick coating of dust. The place looked like the office of some disreputable bailiff. The girl was obliged to fetch a chair from her bedroom.

"I was expecting you," she called out as she went there.

When she came back with the chair, she explained to Rougon that she was busy with her correspondence. She showed him on her desk some large sheets of yellowish paper, covered with large round hand-writing. As Rougon sat down, she noticed that he was in full dress.

"Have you come to ask for my hand?" she said playfully.

"Exactly," he replied.

Then he added with a smile :

"Not for myself, but for one of my friends."

Clorinde looked at him doubtfully, not being able to tell whether he was joking or not. She was dirty and untidy and was wearing an ill-fitting dressing-gown ; but, in spite of these disadvantages, she looked very beautiful, like some antique statue that is soiled with the dust of a broker's shop, but whose beauty is beyond the power of dirt to conceal. As she sucked one of her fingers which she had just smeared with ink, her eyes fell upon the slight scar which was still visible upon Rougon's left cheek. Presently she said in a low voice and with an air of preoccupation.

"I was sure you would come, but I expected you before now."

Then, seeming to wake up, she continued in a louder tone :

"So it is for one of your friends ; your dearest friend, I have no doubt."

She began to laugh. She now felt sure that Rougon had meant himself. She had a strong desire to touch his scar with her finger to satisfy herself that she had really put her mark upon him and that henceforth he belonged to her. Rougon took hold of her wrists and made her sit down in the leather-covered arm-chair.

"Let us have a little talk, shall we ?" he said. "We are good friends, aren't we ? I have been thinking a good deal since the day before yesterday. You have been in my mind the whole time. I fancied that we had got married and that we had been living together for three months. You'll never guess in what position I saw us both."

Clorinde said nothing ; she was feeling a little uneasy in spite of all her coolness.

"I saw us standing by the fire-place. You had taken up the shovel and I had seized the tongs, and we were belabouring each other."

This idea struck Clorinde as so comical that she threw herself back in her chair and broke out into a peal of ringing laughter.

"No, don't laugh," said Rougon ; "I'm quite serious. It isn't worth while uniting our lives just to beat each other. I swear to you that that is what would happen. First there would be blows, and then a separation. Be quite sure of this, that it is useless trying to assimilate two wills."

"Well ?" she asked, becoming very grave.

"Well, I think that the most sensible thing we can do is to shake hands with each other and make up our minds to be nothing else but good friends in the future."

Clorinde made no reply, but she fixed her eyes searchingly upon Rougon's. An angry frown appeared on her brow which looked like that of an offended goddess. Her lips quivered slightly with a silent expression of scorn.

"Will you excuse me ?" she said at last.

Then, pulling her chair up to her desk, she began to fold her letters. She used large grey envelopes, such as are employed in the government offices, and she fastened the flaps down with sealing wax. She had lighted a taper and was watching the wax blaze. Rougon quietly waited till she had finished.

"And you came here to tell me that ?" said Clorinde, without desisting from what she was doing.

Rougon now in his turn made no reply. He wanted to get a glimpse of the girl's face. When at last she turned her chair round again, he smiled at her and tried to catch her eye. Then he kissed her hand, as though he were anxious to soften her ; but she still preserved her haughty coldness.

"I have told you," he said, "that I have come to ask you in marriage on behalf of one of my friends."

Then he began to speak at great length. He loved her, he told her, much more than she imagined. He loved her chiefly because she was intelligent and clever. It cost him a great deal to give her up, but he was sacrificing his passion for the advantage of them both. He would like her to be a queen in her own house. He saw her married to a wealthy man whom she could mould to her own will. She would rule and would not have to surrender her personality. That was much better —wasn't it?—than for them to paralyse one another. He and she could speak the truth openly to each other. He ended by calling her his child. She was his perverse daughter, he said; a girl whose diplomatic bent of mind gave him great pleasure, and whom it would distress him very much to see turn out unsatisfactorily.

“Is that all?” she said, when he finished.

She had listened to him with the greatest attention. Then, raising her eyes to his face, she continued :

“If you want to get me married in the expectation that you will then be able to possess me, I warn you that you are under a great mistake. Never! I have told you so before.”

“What an idea!” he exclaimed, blushing slightly.

He coughed and took a paper-knife off the desk and began to examine the handle in order to conceal the trouble he was feeling from Clorinde's notice. But the girl was deep in thought and was paying no attention to him.

“And who is the husband?” she asked at length.

“Can't you guess?”

A feeble smile again broke out upon the girl's face, and she shrugged her shoulders and began to drum upon the desk with her fingers. She knew very well who it was.

“He is so silly,” she said, in a low voice.

Then Rougon began to defend Delestang. He was a man of good position and means, and she would be able to do anything with him that she liked. Then he gave her particulars as to his health and his fortune and habits; and he promised that he would use all his influence in their favour if ever he returned to power again. Delestang's intelligence, he said, was perhaps not of a lofty order, but he would not be out of place in any situation.

“Oh yes, he'd scrape on well enough; I'm quite willing to allow that,” she said, with a frank laugh.

Then she continued after a pause :

"Well, I don't say no; perhaps you are right. Monsieur Delestang is not distasteful to me."

She looked at Rougon as she spoke these last words. She fancied that she had noticed upon several occasions that he was jealous of Delestang. But she could not see the slightest indication of displeasure upon his face. On the contrary, indeed, he seemed quite delighted with the success of his scheme, and he again began to expatiate upon the advantages of such a marriage, as though he were some shrewd attorney negotiating on her behalf some bargain from which she would derive especial profit. He took her hands in his own and patted them affectionately, as he said :

"It was last night that the idea struck me, and then I said to myself, 'It is the very thing!' I shouldn't like you to remain unmarried. You are the only woman who seems to me to be worthy of a husband. Delestang is an easy-going fellow and won't hamper you at all."

Then he added gaily :

"I feel convinced that you will reward me by letting me see some very wonderful things."

"Is Monsieur Delestang aware of your plans?" Clorinde now asked.

Rougon looked at her in surprise for a moment, as though she had said something which he had not expected from her. Then he calmly replied :

"No; it was no use saying anything to him. I will tell him all about it later on."

The young girl had just resumed the sealing of her letters. When she had pressed the wax with a large blank seal, she turned the envelopes over and addressed them slowly in her big hand-writing. As she tossed the letters away to her right, Rougon tried to read the addresses. They were directed for the most part to well-known Italian politicians. She appeared to notice what he was doing, and she said, as she rose from her chair and gathered up her letters to send them to the post :

"When my mother has one of her headaches, I have to do the letter-writing."

When she left Rougon by himself, he began to walk about the little room. The portfolios in the stand were all labelled as though they belonged to a man of business: "*Receipts*," "*Letters*," and so on. He smiled as, amongst the litter of papers upon the desk, he caught sight of a pair of worn and split stays. There

was a piece of soap in the inkstand and scraps of blue satin upon the floor, the clippings which had resulted from the mending of some dress, and which had not been swept away. The door leading to Clorinde's bedroom was half open, and Rougon had the curiosity to look through ; but the shutters were closed and the room was so dark that he could see nothing but the heavy shadow of the bed-curtains. Clorinde now came back again.

"I must go away," Rougon said to her. "I am going to dine this evening with your man. Do you give me full permission to act ?"

The girl made no reply. She had turned quite grave again, as though she had been reconsidering the matter upon the staircase. Rougon had already got his hand upon the balustrade, but Clorinde brought him back into the room and closed the door. Her dream was being dissipated, the hope of which she had felt so sure that only an hour before she had looked upon it as a certainty. All the burning flush of a deadly insult surged to her cheeks. She felt as though she had received a blow on the face.

"Then you really mean it seriously?" she said, putting her face in the shadow so that Rougon might not see how flushed it was.

When he had repeated his arguments for the third time, she remained silent. She was afraid that if she began to speak on the subject she would be carried away by an impulse of wild anger, which she could feel surging up within her, and she feared she might strike Rougon. Then, in this crumbling away of the future which she had planned for herself, her clear perception of things became dimmed, and she stepped towards the door of her bedroom and all but entered it bidding Rougon follow her by crying out : "Come ! take me ; I will trust myself to you, and you shall not make me your wife unless you like." Meanwhile, Rougon, who was still speaking, suddenly understood what was passing through her mind, and he immediately stopped talking and turned very pale. They looked at each other, and for a moment they quivered with hesitation. Rougon glanced at the bed with its dark overshadowing curtains, while Clorinde had already begun to calculate the consequences of her generosity. But it was only a momentary impulse on both sides.

"You would like this marriage to take place ?" the girl asked slowly

Rougon answered in a clear tone without any hesitation :

“ Yes.”

“ Very well ; let it be then.”

Then they both returned with slow steps towards the door and went out very quietly on to the landing. The only signs of Rougon’s last victory over himself were a drop or two of perspiration upon his brow. Clorinde held herself firm and straight, certain of her power of self-control. They stood looking at each other in silence for a moment or two, having nothing further to say to one another, and yet not being able to make up their minds to part. At last, as Rougon took the girl’s hand to say good-bye, she drew him back slightly and said to him without any trace of anger :

“ You think that you know better than I do, but you are mistaken. You will perhaps be sorry some day.”

That was all she said. She leant over the balustrade and watched him go down the stairs. When he got to the bottom, he raised his head and they smiled at each other. She had no thought of taking any puerile vengeance upon him ; she was already dreaming of punishing him by some splendid future triumph of her own. As she went back into the room, she caught herself murmuring :

“ Ah, well ! all roads lead to Rome.”

From that evening Rougon commenced to lay siege to Delestang’s heart. He told him of some very flattering imaginary remarks which he said Mademoiselle Balbi had made of him at the banquet at the Hôtel de Ville ; and he never wearied of discoursing to the retired attorney about the young girl’s extraordinary beauty ; and he, who had formerly warned him so strongly to be on his guard against women, now did his best to deliver him, bound hand and foot, to Clorinde. One day he would dwell upon the rare beauty of her hands, and on another, he would glorify her figure, describing it in the most alluring language. Delestang, whose inflammable heart was already occupied by Clorinde’s image, was soon all aglow with a hot passion. When Rougon told him that he himself had never thought about her, he confessed that he had been in love with her for the last six months, but had kept silence on the subject from fear of being too late. He now began to go to the Rue Marbeuf every evening to talk about her. There seemed to be a general conspiracy against him, and he never spoke to anyone without hearing an enthusiastic eulogium of the girl he

loved. Even the Charbonnels stopped him one morning in the middle of the Place de la Concorde, and expressed at great length their admiration of the beautiful young lady whom they saw about with him everywhere.

Clorinde, on her side, wore a sweetly smiling face. She had made a fresh plan for her life, and she quickly grew accustomed to the new part she was to play. She did not attempt to win Delestang by the same bold straight forward tactics with which she had tried to subjugate Rougon. She quite changed her manner, and affected a soft languor and guileless timid innocence, and pretended to be so nervous that too tender a squeeze of the hand would upset her. When Delestang told Rougon that she had fainted in his arms just because he had kissed her wrist, the latter affected to consider this as a convincing proof of her purity of mind. As matters, however, seemed to be advancing very slowly, Clorinde surrendered herself to Delestang one July evening in one of her school-girl out-bursts. This conquest of her left Delestang quite distressed and confounded, especially as he thought that he had taken a base advantage of a fainting fit into which she had seemed to fall; for she had lain as though she were dead, and appeared to have no recollection of what had occurred. When he began to hazard some excuse or venture upon any fresh familiarity, she looked at him with such an expression of innocence that he used to stammer, and felt devoured by remorse and desire. So, after this, he began to think seriously about marrying her. In doing so, he saw a means of making reparation for his base action, as well as the means of becoming the legitimate possessor of the bliss he had stolen, that fleeting bliss, the recollection of which burned hot within him and which he despaired of ever knowing again on any other terms.

However, Delestang still hesitated for another week. He went to consult Rougon on the subject. When the latter learnt what had taken place between them he bent his head in thought for a moment, trying to fathom the girl's mysterious nature, and contrasting her long resistance of himself with her sudden surrender to the imbecile before him. He could not guess her reasons for her different behaviour in his own case and in Delestang's. Just for a moment he felt so hurt and angry that he was on the point of telling Delestang all that had passed between himself and Clorinde in the bluntest terms, but he refrained, and all the more as Delestang, like an

honourable man, denied that the girl had had any complicity in what had happened. This was quite sufficient to recall Rougon to himself. Then he proceeded very cleverly to work upon Delestang's feelings. He did not actually advise him to marry the girl, but he led him on to this determination by reflections and observations that seemed almost irrelevant to the subject. He had been much surprised, he said, to hear the unpleasant stories which had been circulated about Mademoiselle Balbi, but he had not believed them, and he had made searching inquiries without succeeding in learning anything to her disadvantage. Moreover, a man should not doubt the woman he loved. Then he said no more on the matter.

Six weeks later, as he came out of the Madeleine, where the marriage had just been celebrated with great magnificence, Rougon said to a deputy who was expressing his astonishment at Delestang's choice :

“ Well, what could you expect of him ? I warned him a hundred times. But he was sure to be taken in by a woman some day.”

Towards the end of the winter, when Delestang and his wife returned from travelling in Italy, they learnt that Rougon was just on the point of marrying Mademoiselle Beulin-d'Orchère. When they went to see him, Clorinde congratulated him very gracefully. He pretended that he was really taking the step to please his friends. For the last three months, he said, they had let him have no peace, but had constantly told him that a man in his position ought to be married. He added laughingly that when his friends came to see him in the evenings, there wasn't even a woman in the house to pour out the tea.

“ It's very sudden, isn't it ? You weren't thinking about it a little time ago, were you ? ” asked Clorinde with a smile. “ You ought to have got married at the same time as we did, and then we could all have gone to Italy, together.”

Then she began to question him playfully. Wasn't it his friend, Du Poizat, who had suggested this pretty idea ? This he strongly denied, and asserted that Du Poizat, on the contrary, was strongly opposed to the marriage ; the ex-sub-prefect abominated Monsieur Beulin-d'Orchère. All the rest, however, Monsieur Kahn, Monsieur Béjuin, Madame Correur, and even the Charbonnels, were never weary of singing the praises of Mademoiselle Véronique. According to their account,

she would bring to his house every imaginable virtue and prosperity and charm. Then he concluded by saying jocosely :

“She seems to have been made on purpose for me, and so I really couldn’t refuse to take her.”

Then he added with a subtle smile.

“If we are going to have war in the autumn, it is necessary to think about making alliances.”

Clorinde expressed her perfect approval ; and she, too, began to sound Mademoiselle Beulin-d’Orchère’s praises loudly, though she had only seen her once. Delestang, who had hitherto confined himself to nodding his head assentingly, without ever taking his eyes off his wife, now began an enthusiastic disquisition upon the advantages of marriage. He was commencing a detailed account of his own happiness, when his wife rose and said they had another visit to make. As Rougon went with them to the door, she held him back for a moment, letting her husband go on in front.

“ Didn’t I tell you that you would be married within the year ? ” she whispered softly into his ear.

CHAPTER VI.

SUMMER came round. Rougon was leading a life of perfect quietude. In three months Madame Rougon had replaced the somewhat equivocal tone of the house in the Rue Marbeuf by one of the most solemn respectability. The slightly chill rooms with their methodically arranged furniture breathed out an atmosphere of propriety ; while the closely drawn curtains, which scarcely allowed a ray of light to filter through them, and the thick carpets that muffled every sound, gave an air of almost conventional austerity to the house. The very furniture seemed to have acquired an appearance of age, and the rooms were filled with an ancient musty smell. The tall plain woman exercised an ever watchful surveillance, gliding through the subdued stillness of the house with noiseless foot-falls ; and she managed everything with such discretion and readiness that she might have spent twenty years of married life in the place instead of only three months.

When he received congratulations, Rougon smiled. He still continued to say that he had got married upon the advice of his friends and that his bride was their choice. His wife made him very happy. For a long time past he had desired to have a quiet domestic home, which might stand forth as a proof of his decorous respectability. He considered that it would be the means of freeing him from his doubtful past and ranking him henceforward amongst steady-going reputable men. There was still a good deal of provincialism about his tastes, and certain plentifully furnished drawing-rooms that he remembered at Plassans, in which the chairs and couches were kept swathed in their white coverings all the year round, still formed his ideal models. When he went to Delestang's house, he showed his contempt for Clorinde's whimsical and extravagant display of luxury by a slight shrug of his shoulders. Nothing seemed to him so ridiculous as throwing money, as it were, out of the window ; not that he was at all miserly, but he said that he could find enjoyments far preferable to those that were to be

obtained from the spending of money. He had handed over to his wife the care of their fortune. Until his marriage he had lived without any regular calculation of his expenses, but now Madame Rougon looked after his money with the same zealous care as she showed in the management of the house.

During the first few months after his marriage, Rougon lived a life of retirement and seclusion, preparing himself for the contest which he was meditating. He loved power for its own sake, quite apart from all hankerings after riches and honour and pride of place. Grossly ignorant and of little skill in anything apart from the management of men, it was only his keen craving after power that elevated him into a position of superiority. The ambition of raising himself above the crowd, which seemed to him to be made up of fools and knaves, and of being able to drive men by force, developed in his heavy nature a cunning skill and a wonderful energy. He believed only in himself, took his convictions for reasons, and held everything subordinate to the increase of his own personal influence. Addicted to no vice, he had secret orgies when he revelled in the idea of obtaining supreme power. Though he had inherited his father's broad massive shoulders and heavy face, he had received from his mother, the redoubtable Félicité who governed Plassans, a strong will and unswerving determination which disdained small means and commonplace gratifications. He was certainly the greatest of the Rougons.

When he found himself thus solitary and unoccupied after years of active life, his first feeling was one of delightful drowsiness. He felt as though he had had no sleep since the exciting days of 1851, and he accepted his dismissal as a holiday which he had well earned by long service. He contemplated holding himself aloof for six months, which would give him time to choose a better battle-ground, and then he could join in the great fight again at his own discretion. But by the end of a few weeks he was already weary of resting. He had never before been so clearly conscious of his own strength and capability, and his head and body became a source of uneasy embarrassment to him, now that he was no longer actively using them. He spent whole days in pacing up and down in the privacy of his garden and yawning wearily, like a caged lion restlessly stretching its stiffened limbs. There now commenced for him a period of the most distasteful existence, the overwhelming wearisomeness of which he strove to conceal

from all eyes. To his friends he professed himself perfectly happy, and said that he considered himself very fortunate in being "well out of the mess," but his heavy eyelids would open widely occasionally as he scanned the newspapers and then drop listlessly again as soon as he saw anyone looking at him. What helped more than anything to support him in the monotonous condition of life into which he had fallen was the unpopularity which he realised he had incurred. His fall seemed to have caused universal satisfaction. Not a day passed without the newspapers making an attack upon him. They spoke of him as the personification of the Coup d'Etat, of the proscriptions, and of all the other violent measures to which they referred in veiled language; and they even went so far as to congratulate the Emperor upon having severed his connection with a servant who had done his best to compromise him.

At the Tuilleries the feeling of hostility against him was even more marked. Marsy, now triumphant, assailed him with witticisms which the ladies retailed in the drawing-rooms. This bitter feeling against him acted as a solace to Rougon and confirmed him in his contempt for the human flock of sheep. They had not forgotten him; they detested him; and that was a source of great satisfaction to him. Himself against the world! It was a thought which had a peculiar charm for him; and he saw himself standing alone, whip in hand, and forcing the yelping pack to keep their distance. He revelled in the insults which were offered to him, and held his head higher than ever in his haughty seclusion.

His brawny body, however, was suffering terribly from his continued inactivity. If he had dared to do so, he would have seized a spade and dug up his garden. He commenced a long task, that of carefully comparing the English constitution with the Imperial constitution of 1852, in the idea of proving, by going carefully into the history and political institutions of the two peoples, that the French had as much liberty as the English. When he had collected all the necessary authorities and had accumulated a sufficient quantity of notes, he had to force himself into taking up his pen. He could have made a long speech before the Chamber on the subject quite easily, but to write a treatise, with careful thought as to diction and expression, would be, he felt quite certain, a work of the greatest labour and destitute, moreover, of any immediate utility to him. To express himself in good literary style had

always been very difficult to him and this had made him affect to despise it. He got only ten pages of his treatise written, but he kept the manuscript constantly upon his desk, though he did not add twenty lines to it a week. Whenever anyone asked him how he employed his time, he explained his project at great length and dwelt upon the great compass of his work. It was the excuse of which he availed himself to conceal the hateful emptiness of his life.

The months went on, and he still presented a serene and smiling face to the world. Not a sign of the utter weariness he was suffering did he allow to appear. When his intimate friends sympathized with him, he assured them of his perfect felicity and gave them the most convincing reasons for it. Had he not everything to make him happy? he asked. He delighted in study, and now he was able to work away to his heart's content, which was infinitely preferable to the feverish agitation of public life. As the Emperor had no need of his services, he was very grateful to him for allowing him to remain quiet and peaceful in his own little corner. He never spoke of the Emperor except in terms of the profoundest devotion. He frequently said that he was perfectly willing to take up the burden of power again upon a sign from his master, but he added that he would never voluntarily take a single step towards exciting that sign. To all appearances, indeed, he seemed very anxious to keep himself aloof. Through the quietude of the early years of the Empire and in the midst of that strange state of torpor which was made up of mingled fear and weariness, he could hear the dull sounds of a coming awakening, and he was reckoning upon some catastrophe which would suddenly make him necessary to the state. He was the man for grave situations, "the man with the big paws," as Monsieur de Marsy put it.

The Rougons received their friends at their house in the Rue Marbeuf on Sundays and Thursdays. They came and chatted in the large red drawing-room till half past ten o'clock, at which time Rougon pitilessly turned them out-of-doors. Very late hours, he said, fogged the brain. Exactly at ten o'clock, Madame Rougon herself served tea. There were only two plates of little cakes which no one ever touched.

On the Thursday in the July of that year which followed the general elections, the Rougons' friends had been assembled in the drawing-room since eight o'clock. Madame Bouchard,

Madame Charbonnel and Madame Correur were sitting near an open window to breathe the occasional whiffs of fresh air which found their way in from the little garden, forming a circle in the centre of which Monsieur d'Escorailles was relating the pranks he had played at Plassans, going off to spend twelve hours at Monaco for instance, on the pretext of a shooting expedition with a friend. Madame Rougon, who was dressed in black and was sitting half concealed behind a curtain, paying no attention to what Monsieur d'Escorailles was saying, often quietly got up and left the room. She frequently disappeared for a whole quarter of an hour at a time. Monsieur Charbonnel was sitting on the edge of an easy-chair near the ladies, lost in amazement at hearing a young man of high rank confessing such adventures. At the other end of the room Clorinde was standing up and listening with an air of pre-occupation to a conversation on the crops in which her husband and Monsieur Béjuin were engaged. She was wearing a pale creamy dress, freely trimmed with straw-coloured ribbons, and she kept gently tapping the palm of her left hand with her fan as she gazed abstractedly upon the luminous globe of the one lamp with which the drawing-room was lighted. The colonel and Monsieur Bouchard were playing piquet at a card-table, while Rougon like a fortune-teller was consulting a pack of cards on a corner of the green cloth, picking them up and laying them down with a grave expression. It was his favourite amusement on Thursdays and Sundays, affording occupation both for his fingers and his mind.

"Well, will you manage to make them come right?" Clorinde asked with a smile as she approached and stooped over him.

"They always come right," he replied quietly.

Clorinde remained standing opposite him on the other side of the table while he divided the pack of cards into eight heaps.

When he had picked up all the cards in pairs, she said: "Yes, you have managed it all right. But what did you want the cards to tell you?"

Rougon raised his eyes slowly as though he were surprised at the question.

"What kind of weather we shall have to-morrow," he said at length.

Then he began to spread the cards out again. Delestang

and Monsieur Béjuin had given over talking, and the silence of the room was broken only by pretty Madame Bouchard's rippling laugh. Clorinde stepped up to a window and stood there for a moment or two looking out into the deepening twilight.

"Is there any news of that poor Monsieur Kahn?" she asked, without turning her head round.

"I have had a letter," said Rougon. "I am expecting him this evening."

Then the conversation turned upon Monsieur Kahn's ill fortune. He had been imprudent enough during the last session to criticize very sharply a bill brought in by the government. This bill, which authorized a most dangerous competition in a neighbouring district, threatened the Bressuire blast-furnaces with ruin. Monsieur Kahn, however, had not for a moment imagined that he had exceeded the bounds of fair and permissible opposition; but when he went down to Deux-Sèvres, to prepare for his re-election, he was informed by the prefect himself that he was no longer the official candidate. He had ceased to find favour, and the minister had just nominated an advocate at Niort, a man of the most mediocre abilities and position. This was a crushing blow for poor Monsieur Kahn.

Rougon was giving his friends the particulars of the matter, when Monsieur Kahn came into the room, followed by Du Poizat. They had both arrived by the seven o'clock train, and they had only taken just sufficient time to dine before presenting themselves at Rougon's.

"Well, what do you think of it all?" said Monsieur Kahn, standing in the middle of the room while everyone pressed round him. "Fancy me being a revolutionist!"

Du Poizat had thrown himself down into an easy-chair with an air of weary disgust.

"A nice country this is!" he cried. "A pretty state it's in! It's enough to disgust all decent people!"

The company insisted upon Monsieur Kahn telling them the story in all its details. He told them that as soon as he reached Deux-Sèvres he noticed a sort of embarrassment in the manner even of his best friends. He said that the prefect, Monsieur de Langlade was a man of dissolute character, and he accused him of being on too familiar terms with the wife of the new deputy, the Niort advocate. However, this man Langlade, he said, had told him of the disfavour into which he

had fallen in a kindly enough fashion as they were smoking their cigars after a breakfast at the prefecture. Monsieur Kahn gave the company a detailed account of what had passed between himself and Monsieur de Langlade. The worst of the matter, he said, was that his addresses and other bills were already being printed. He had felt so indignant at first, he declared, that he had determined to stand all the same.

“Ah! if you hadn’t written to us,” interposed Du Poizat, turning towards Rougon, “we should have taught the government a pretty lesson!”

Rougon shrugged his shoulders.

“You would have failed, and you would have compromised yourselves for all time to come,” he said carelessly, as he shuffled his cards. “That would have been a fine feat!”

“I don’t know what you’re made of!” cried Du Poizat, jumping up suddenly from his chair with a gesture of indignation. “For my own part, I’ve no hesitation in declaring that that fellow Marsy is getting past all bearing. It was you yourself that he was aiming at when he struck our friend Kahn. Have you seen his circulars? A pretty business his elections were! He settled them all with bits of rhetoric! Don’t smile! If you had been Minister of the Interior, you would have managed matters in a very different fashion.”

Then, seeing that Rougon still continued to smile as he looked at him, he added yet more energetically:

“We were on the spot and we saw the whole business. There was one unfortunate man, an old comrade of mine, who had the temerity to come out as a republican candidate. You can’t imagine the abominable way in which he was treated. The prefect, the mayors, the gendarmes, the whole clique, fell foul of him. They defaced his bills and threw his addresses into the ditches. They arrested the poor fellows who were distributing his circulars, and they couldn’t even leave his poor aunt alone, a most estimable woman, who was obliged to beg of him not to come to her house any more, as he was only compromising her. The newspapers spoke of him as though he were a cut-throat, and, now, when he passes through a village, all the women cross themselves.”

Then he flung himself indignantly down into his chair again and continued :

“Well, although Marsy has got a majority in all the departments, Paris has at any-rate returned five opposition

deputies. That is the beginning of the reaction. If the Emperor goes on leaving the power in the hands of this great coxcomb of a minister and these wanton prefects who send poor husbands off to the Chamber so that they may have free access to their wives' beds, in five years from now the Empire will be tottering upon the verge of ruin. For my own part, I am quite delighted with the result of the elections in Paris. They have avenged us, I think."

"Then, if you had been prefect—" began Rougon quietly, and with just such a slight touch of irony, that his heavy lips barely gave a perceptible twist.

Du Poizat showed his irregular white teeth, and he grasped the arms of his chair with his frail delicate hands as though he wanted to twist them.

"Oh!" he said, "if I had been prefect—"

But he did not finish the sentence. He sank down against the back of his chair, and exclaimed :

"It is getting quite sickening. I have really always been a republican."

The ladies by the window were now silently looking towards the middle of the room and listening to what was being said. Monsieur d'Escorailles was holding a large fan with which he was fanning pretty Madame Bouchard who looked quite overcome with the heat. The colonel and Monsieur Bouchard, who had just commenced a fresh game, stopped their play every now and then and expressed their approval or disapproval of what was being said by nodding or shaking their heads. There was a wide circle of chairs drawn up around Rougon. Clorinde, listening attentively with her chin resting upon her hand, did not venture even to indulge in a gesture. Delestang, dwelling upon some tender recollection, was smiling at his wife. Monsieur Béjuin, with his hands clasped upon his knees, was looking at the ladies and gentlemen in succession, with a dazed expression. The sudden entrance of Du Poizat and Monsieur Kahn had stirred up a perfect storm in the quietness of the drawing-room. They seemed to have brought with them an odour of opposition clinging to the folds of their clothes.

"Well, in the end I followed your advice and retired," said Monsieur Kahn. "They warned me that I should receive even worse treatment than the republican candidate, I who have served the Empire with such devotion! Confess, now, that

such ingratitude is enough to damp the enthusiasm of the firmest supporters."

Then he began to complain of a whole string of annoyances and vexations. He had been anxious to start a newspaper which should support his scheme of a line from Niort to Angers, and he intended it to become, later on, a very useful weapon in his hands, but he had just been refused the necessary authorization. Monsieur de Marsy had suspected that Rougon was making a cloak of Monsieur Kahn, and that the contemplated journal would be used for making political assaults upon his administration.

"They are afraid," said Du Poizat, "lest some one should at last write the truth about them. Ah! I would have furnished you with some sweet articles! It is disgraceful to have such a press as we have, gagged and threatened with suppression at the first word of complaint it dares to make. A friend of mine, who is bringing out a novel, was summoned to the ministry, where a head-clerk requested him to change the colour of his hero's waistcoat, as the colour which he had assigned to it was distasteful to the minister. This is perfectly true. It is no invention."

He cited other facts, and told them of terrible stories which were being circulated amongst the people; of the suicides of a young actress and a relation of the Emperor's, and of an alleged duel between two generals, one of whom had killed the other, in one of the corridors of the Tuilleries, the consequence of some story of robbery. "Would stories of this kind!" he exclaimed, "ever have found any credence if the press had been allowed to speak freely?" Then he concluded by saying:

"I am a republican, decidedly I am."

"You are very fortunate," remarked Monsieur Kahn. "I no longer know what I am."

Rougon, bending his broad shoulders forward, had commenced a very elaborate arrangement. His aim, after having dealt out the cards three times, first into seven heaps, then into five, and finally into three, was to bring eight clubs together. He seemed completely absorbed in what he was doing, but still he pricked up his ears at certain words every now and then.

"The parliamentary system afforded us trustworthy guarantees," remarked the colonel. "Ah! if we could only have the princes back!"

When his fits of opposition were on, Colonel Jobelin was an

Orleanist. He related with much animation the events of the engagement of Mouzaïa, at which he had fought by the side of the Duc d'Aumale, who was then a captain in the fourth regiment of the line.

"We all got on very well under Louis Philippe," he continued, noticing the silence with which his expression of regret was received. "Don't you believe that, if we had a responsible cabinet, our friend here would be at the head of the government before six months were over? We should soon have another great speaker the more."

Monsieur Bouchard was beginning to manifest signs of impatience. He professed himself to be a Legitimist; his grandfather had had relations with the court in former days. Every evening he and his cousin had excited discussions upon politics.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, "your July monarchy only existed by dint of expedients. There is only one real principle as you know quite well."

They began to get rather warm with each other. They made a clean sweep of the Empire, and each installed the government of his own particular choice. Would the Orleans family, cried one, have ever made the decoration of an old soldier a matter of bargain? Would the Legitimist Kings ever have been guilty of such unjust favouritism as was now to be seen every day in the government service? As they were getting to hot words and beginning to rate each other roundly, the colonel cried out, tapping his cards angrily:

"Make less noise, do you hear, Bouchard, and attend to the game!"

Delestang, whom the dispute had awakened from his reverie, felt himself bound to defend the Empire. Certainly, he said, it was not everything that he could wish. He would have liked a government of wider sympathies. Then he went on to attempt an exposition of his own aspirations. They embraced a very complicated social system, which included the extinction of pauperism and the association of workmen; a system, in fact, very much like that of his model farm of La Chamade on a large scale. While her husband was speaking and wagging his head with an official air, Clorinde kept her eyes upon him, with a slight pout on her lips.

"Yes, certainly I'm a Bonapartist," he repeated more than once; "a liberal Bonapartist, if you like, but a Bonapartist certainly."

"And you, Béjuin ?" Monsieur Kahn questioned sharply.

"Oh, I am one too," replied Monsieur Béjuin ; "there are shades and distinctions of course, but I am certainly a Bonapartist."

Du Poizat broke out into a shrill laugh.

"Of course !" he exclaimed.

And when they pressed him to explain himself, he continued :

"Oh ! I am amused with your devotion. You haven't been turned out, you see. Delestang is still in the Council of State, and Béjuin has just been re-elected."

"That was quite a matter of course," said Béjuin ; "the prefect of the Cher—"

"Oh, I'm not making any accusations against you. But you are not in for nothing, and we all know how these matters are worked. Combelot, too, is re-elected, and La Rouquette also. Oh, the Empire is a magnificent institution !"

Monsieur d'Escorailles, who was still employing himself in fanning pretty Madame Bouchard, now felt constrained to put in a word. He defended the Empire from another point of view. He had given in his adhesion to it, he said, because it seemed to him that the Emperor had a grand mission before him. "The salvation of France before everything else !"

"You have retained your berth as auditor, haven't you ?" asked Du Poizat, raising his voice. "Well, then, there's no difficulty in guessing what your views are. You all seem terribly scandalised by what I'm saying ; but it's a very simple matter. Kahn and I, you see, are no longer paid to keep our eyes shut."

The others were beginning to show a little temper. It was disgraceful, they asserted, to take such a view of politics. There was something else than mere personal interests to be considered. The colonel and Monsieur Bouchard, although they were not Bonapartists themselves, recognised the possibility of a man being a Bonapartist conscientiously ; and the partizans of the Empire in Rougon's drawing-room waxed as hot in support of their principles as though an attempt was being made to forcibly wrench them from them. Delestang seemed especially offended, and he complained that he had been quite misunderstood in what he had said, and he went on to point out various considerable matters in which he differed from the blind partizans of the Empire. This led him on to discourse of the democratical developments of which the Emperor's government

seemed to him to be capable. Neither Monsieur Béjuin nor himself, any more than Monsieur d'Escorailles, was willing to accept the word Bonapartist quite unqualified. There were Bonapartists of widely different kinds, each section holding opinions that differed from those held by the others in a manner which it was difficult to describe clearly. By the end of ten minutes he had managed in one way or another to set the whole company against him, and there was a general confusion of voices raised in dispute, while the words "Legitimist," "Orleanist," "Republican," were hurled about in the midst of constantly repeated professions of political faith. Madame Rougon looked in at one of the doors for a moment, with an air of uneasiness, and then quietly disappeared again.

Rougon had now just succeeded in getting his clubs into the proper sequence. Clorinde stooped down and asked him in the midst of the general uproar :

" Well, have you managed it ? "

" Certainly," he replied, with his quiet smile.

Then, as if he had only just become aware of the conflict of tongues, he shook his hand and said :

" What a noise you are making ! "

They all stopped talking, thinking that he wanted to say something, and there was perfect silence in the room. They were all waiting for him to speak ; they had become a little weary of the discussion they had had. Rougon, by a jerk of his thumb, had just spread thirteen cards out on the table in the shape of a fan. He reckoned them over, and then, in the midst of the hushed silence of the room, he spoke.

" Three queens," he said ; " the sign of a quarrel. A dark woman, who is not to be trusted—"

Then Du Poizat impatiently interrupted him.

" Well, Rougon, and what is your opinion ? "

The great man threw himself back in his chair and stretched out his legs, as he concealed a slight yawn with his hand. He pushed up his chin as though his neck were paining him.

" Oh, I," he said, fixing his eyes upon the ceiling, " I am a supporter of the actually established government. It is not an opinion ; it is a necessity with me. It was born with me. It is very foolish of you to dispute and wrangle in this way. In France, whenever you get five men together, you have the advocates of five different kinds of government before you. But that doesn't prevent a man from loyally serving the government

that is actually established. You're talking just for the sake of talking."

Then he let his chin drop and gave a slow glance round the room.

"Marsy has managed the elections very well. You are wrong to blame his circulars. The last one was an extremely good one. And as for the press, I think that it has got too much liberty as it is. What kind of state should we be in, if any one could write everything he liked? I should have taken just the same course myself as Marsy has done in refusing to grant Kahn permission to start a newspaper. It is always unwise to provide your opponents with a weapon. Soft-hearted Empires will certainly come to grief. France requires an iron hand, and it's none the worse for being grasped a little tightly."

Delestang felt bound to protest against this.

"But, at any rate, there is a certain amount of liberty necessary—" he commenced.

Clorinde, however, made him stop. She had expressed her approval of all Rougon had said by an ostentatious nodding of her head. She had pushed herself forward so that he might see her better, and observe how convinced she was by what he had asserted. And it was at her that he cast a quick glance as he exclaimed :

"Oh, yes! necessary liberty! I was expecting to hear that dragged in! Now, I tell you that if the Emperor took my advice, he would never grant a single liberty."

As Delestang again manifested an inclination to protest, his wife reduced him to quietness by a threatening frown of her beautiful eyelashes.

"Not one!" repeated Rougon, energetically.

He sprang up from his chair and looked so formidable that no one ventured to speak a word. Then he dropped down again, and his limbs seemed to relax and grow limp.

"Just see how you've made me harangue you," he said. "I'm only a simple private citizen now, and I have no need to mix myself up with it all any longer, thank goodness. Heaven grant that the Emperor may have no further occasion for my services!"

Just at this moment the door of the drawing-room was opened. Rougon put his finger to his mouth and whispered :

"Hush!"

It was Monsieur La Rouquette. Rougon guessed that he had

been sent by his sister, Madame de Llorentz, to report on what was said in his drawing-room. Monsieur de Marsy, although he had been married only six months, had just renewed his intimacy with this lady, who had been his mistress for nearly two years. The company, consequently, gave over discussing politics as soon as the young deputy made his appearance, and the drawing-room resumed its ordinary decorous quietude. Rougon himself went to find a large shade which he placed over the lamp, and nothing could be seen, in the narrow circle of yellow light, but the dry-looking hands of the colonel and Monsieur Bouchard methodically laying down their cards. In front of the window Madame Charbonnel was telling her troubles in a low voice to Madame Correur, while Monsieur Charbonnel accentuated each detail with a deep sigh. They would soon have been two years in Paris, the lady was sadly saying, and the wretched suit seemed as though it never would come to an end. Only yesterday she had been obliged to buy herself six new chemises and her husband six new shirts, upon learning that the matter had been again adjourned. A little behind this group, near a curtain, was Madame Bouchard, who had apparently dropped off to sleep, rendered drowsy by the heat. Monsieur d'Escorailles came up to join her again, and then, as no one was looking at them, he had the calm impudence to imprint a long silent kiss upon her half-closed lips. She opened her eyes to their full extent, looking very solemn, but she kept quite still.

“Oh dear, no!” Monsieur La Rouquette was saying just at this moment; “I haven’t gone to the Variétés. I saw the full-dress rehearsal of the piece. It’s a tremendous success; the music is wonderfully bright and sparkling. It will draw all Paris. I had some work to finish. I am getting up some details.”

He had shaken hands with the men, and had gallantly kissed Clorinde’s wrist above her glove. He remained standing, smiling and leaning against the back of an arm-chair. He was dressed in the most irreproachable fashion, and there was an air of solemn gravity about the way in which his frock-coat was buttoned.

“By the way,” he said, addressing himself to the master of the house, “there is a publication to which I should like to call your attention in connection with your great work, a study of the English constitution; a most interesting one, indeed, which

has appeared in a Vienna review. Are you making fair progress?"

"Oh, I'm only getting on slowly," Rougon replied. "Just now I'm engaged upon a chapter which is giving me a great deal of trouble."

Generally speaking, he found a conversation with the young deputy very interesting, for he learnt from him all that was going on at the Tuileries. He felt sure that he had been sent to his house that evening to find out what he thought about the success of the official candidates, and he succeeded in worming a large amount of information out of him, without he himself letting fall a single remark that was worth repeating. He began by congratulating the young deputy upon his re-election. Then he kept up the conversation by merely nodding his head occasionally. La Rouquette, pleased to hear himself speak, talked freely. The court, he said, was delighted. The Emperor had learnt the result of the elections, at Plombières, and it was said that when the telegram was received he was obliged to sit down, as his legs quite trembled from joy. But there was one great source of uneasiness in the midst of all these victories. Paris had just shown itself a monster of ingratitude at the polls.

"Pooh! they can easily muzzle Paris!" said Rougon, stifling another yawn, as though he were beginning to feel a little bored at finding nothing interesting in all Monsieur La Rouquette's flood of talk.

Ten o'clock struck. Madame Rougon pushed a small table into the centre of the room and began to pour out the tea. The company now began to gather in little isolated groups in different parts of the room. Monsieur Kahn, holding his cup in his hand, was standing in front of Delestang, who never took tea because it affected his nerves, and was giving him some additional particulars of his journey down to La Vendée. His great project of obtaining a concession for a railway from Niort to Angers was no further advanced, he said. That scamp of a Langlade, the prefect of Deux-Sèvres, had had the audacity to avail himself of his scheme and use it in the election in favour of the new official candidate.

Monsieur La Rouquette had now slipped behind the ladies, and kept making whispered little remarks to them which excited their smiles. Madame Correur was talking with animation to Du Poizat behind a rampart of chairs. She asked him about her brother Martineau, the notary at Coulonges, and Du Poizat

told her that he had just seen him for a moment in front of the church, looking exactly the same as ever, with his hard face and solemn air. Then, as she began to break out into her usual recriminations, he mischievously advised her never to make her appearance at her brother's house, as Madame Martineau had sworn she would fling her out of the door. Madame Correur finished her tea, feeling quite choked.

“Come, my children, it's time to go to bed,” said Rougon, paternally.

It was now twenty-five minutes past ten, and he gave them five minutes longer. The party now began to break up. Rougon went to the door with Monsieur Kahn and Monsieur Béjuin, whom Madame Rougon always charged with compliments for their wives, though she saw these ladies, at the most, twice a year. Then Rougon gently pushed the Charbonnels towards the door. They were always greatly embarrassed about taking their leave. Then, as pretty Madame Bouchard was going off between Monsieur d'Escorailles and Monsieur La Rouquette, he turned round to the card-table and exclaimed:

“Well, Monsieur Bouchard, don't you see that they are going off with your wife?”

But the chief-clerk, without appearing to hear, went on calling out his game.

“A major sequence in clubs! capital! Three kings; that's very nice too.”

Rougon gathered up the cards with his big hands.

“Come, you've had enough now! Get away home with you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for getting so excited over it. Come, colonel, come.”

It was just the same every Thursday and Sunday. It was necessary to stop them in the middle of a game and sometimes even to turn the lamp out before they could be prevailed upon to give up their play. Then they went off, disputing with each other.

Delestang and Clorinde were the last to go. While her husband was hunting about the room for her fan, the latter said softly to Rougon:

“It is foolish of you not to take a little exercise; you will make yourself ill.”

Rougon assumed an expression of indifference and resignation; Madame Rougon was already gathering together the cups and teaspoons. As Delestang shook hands with him, Rougon broke

out into a wide and undisguised yawn; but, so that he might not be supposed to be feeling weary of his visitors, he excused himself by saying :

“ I am feeling so dreadfully sleepy to-night.”

The evenings always passed away in this manner. There was a sombre atmosphere about the room, and Du Poizat said that “ it smelt too much of devotion.” Clorinde went there a great deal. She often came by herself in the afternoon to fulfil some commission with which she had been charged. She used to tell Madame Rougon playfully that she had come to make love to her husband, and the wife, with a smile upon her pale lips, used to leave them together for hours at a time. They conversed familiarly, without appearing to be disturbed by any recollection of the past, and they gave each other friendly grasps of the hand in that same room where only the year before Rougon had paced up and down before the girl, restless and hot with desire. They seemed to have forgotten all about that now, and they gave themselves up to a quiet tranquil friendship. Rougon would push back with his hand the young woman’s straying hair, which the wind seemed to be always blowing loose, and help her to free from the crowd of chairs the train of her dress, which she always wore of an excessive length. One day, as they were going through the garden, she had the curiosity to push open the door of the stable. She went inside, giving a glance at Rougon and laughing slightly. He merely remarked with a smile, as he stood with his hands in his pockets :

“ How foolish people can be sometimes ! ”

Whenever she came to see him, he always gave her some good advice. He spoke much in favour of Delestang, who, on the whole, made a very good husband. Clorinde said that she had great esteem for him, and he did not appear to have a simple cause of complaint against her. She said that she never even flirted, and this was quite true. Her slightest remarks seemed tinged with indifference, almost with contempt, for men.

When anyone spoke of a woman with more lovers than could be counted, she used to open her great child-like eyes with an air of surprise and express her wonder what pleasure anyone could find in such conduct. For weeks together she seemed quite unconscious of her beauty, and only appeared to recollect it again in some emergency, and then she keenly availed herself of it as a weapon. One day when Rougon, who harped upon the subject with singular pertinacity, was advising her to keep

faithful to Delestang, she ended by showing some displeasure and exclaiming :

"Oh, leave me alone. I'm quite aware of all you're saying. Really, you are getting a little offensive."

One day she said to him bluntly:

"Well, and supposing such a thing did happen, what difference would it make to you? You have nothing to lose by it."

Rougon blushed, and for some time afterwards he said nothing to her on the subject of her duties or of society or the proprieties. This persistent thrill of jealousy was all that now remained to him of his old passion. He even went so far as to keep a careful watch over her in the drawing-rooms which she frequented ; and, if he had scented the slightest intrigue, he would probably have warned her husband. As a matter of fact, when he met the latter alone, he did advise him to be on his guard, and spoke to him of his wife's extraordinary beauty. Delestang, however, always laughed with an air of fatuous confidence, and it was Rougon who really endured all the jealous torments of a betrayed husband.

His other counsels, practical ones, testified to his great affection for Clorinde. It was he who gently persuaded her to send her mother back to Italy. The Countess Balbi, left alone in her little house in the Champs Elysées, had begun, quite regardless of public opinion, to lead a strange life which gave rise to much talk. Rougon took upon himself to settle the delicate question of an allowance. The house was sold and the young woman's past was wiped out. Then Rougon began to try to cure her of her eccentricities, but here he found himself confronted by utter naiveté and obtuse feminine obstinacy. Clorinde, now that she was married and wealthy, lived in lavish state, although she was subject now and then to sudden impulses of sordid miserliness. She had kept her little maid, the dusky Antonia who sucked oranges from morning till night. The two of them made an abominable mess of Clorinde's room in the great house in the Rue du Colisée. When Rougon went to see her, he found a litter of dirty plates upon the chairs, and bottles of sweet wine strewn along the floor by the side of the wall. Beneath the furniture he could see an untidy accumulation of things which had been hastily thrust there out of sight upon his visit being announced.

In the midst of the greasy curtains and soiled, dusty wood-work, Clorinde still continued to indulge in the most extra-

ordinary caprices. She would often receive her friends in a state of semi-nudity, wrapt round with a rug, and lying at full length upon a couch, complaining of the strangest troubles, of a dog, for instance, which was gnawing at her foot, or of a pin which she had accidentally swallowed, and the point of which, she said, was now trying to force its way out through her left thigh. At other times she would close the Venetian shutters at three o'clock in the afternoon, and light all the candles. Then she and Antonia would begin to dance, the one facing the other, and would go off into such paroxysms of laughter that when Rougon arrived the maid had to stand panting by the door for five minutes before she could leave the room. One day Clorinde had the whim to remain invisible ; she sewed the curtains of her bed together from top to bottom ; and she sat upon her pillow inside the cage she had formed, talking to Rougon for more than an hour, as calmly as though they had been sitting on either side of the fire. These extravagant eccentricities seemed to come quite natural to her. When Rougon chided her for them, she appeared quite surprised, and said that she was not doing anything improper. It was all in vain that he preached propriety to her, and promised to make her the most seductive woman in Paris in a month's time, if she would merely be guided by him ; she only seemed vexed, and exclaimed :

“ It's my nature to be like this ; I always go on like this. What harm does it do anybody ? ”

Sometimes she would smile and say :

“ Oh, well, they love me all the same ! Don't preach ! ”

Delestang, indeed, quite worshipped her. She still remained like his mistress, and with the more influence over him, as she seemed to be less like his wife. He shut his eyes to her caprices, smitten with a terrible fear lest she should go off and leave him, as she had one day threatened to do. At the bottom of his meek submission there was probably a feeling that she was his superior, and quite able to do whatever she liked with him. In the presence of society he treated her almost like a child, and spoke to her with the grave complacency of a serious man. But when they were by themselves, this handsome fellow, with the haughty head, would burst into tears if she would not let him into her room at night. The only check he put upon her was to remove the keys of the rooms on the first floor, so that he might keep his large drawing-room free from grease and dirt.

Rougon, however, succeeded in getting Clorinde to promise that she would dress a little more like other people. She was very clever and cunning, with the cunningness of lunatics with lucid intervals who manage to appear perfectly rational in the presence of strangers. He met her in certain houses to which she went, looking quite demure and reserved, allowing her husband to do all the talking, and doing nothing to detract from the admiration excited by her great beauty. At her own house, Rougon frequently found Monsieur de Plouguern, and Clorinde would sit between them making playful remarks, while they poured out streams of moral disquisitions for her benefit. Sometimes the old senator would familiarly pat the girl's cheeks, much to Rougon's annoyance, though the latter never ventured to express what he thought on the subject. He was more courageous as regarded Luigi Pozzo, the Chevalier Rusconi's secretary. He had frequently noticed him leaving Clorinde's house at unusual hours. When he hinted to the young woman that such proceedings might compromise her very seriously, she raised her eyes with a pretty look of surprise, and then burst out laughing. She didn't care anything at all about what people thought, she cried. In Italy ladies received the men they found agreeable, and no one ever dreamt of any evil. Besides, Luigi counted for nothing. He was her cousin, and he brought her little Milanese cakes, which he bought in the Passage Colbert.

It was with politics, however, that Clorinde's mind was chiefly occupied. Since she had married Delestang, her brain had been employed upon deep and complicated questions, of which no one was quite able to see the importance. She found in them a means of satisfying her craving for intrigue, which had so long found scope in her attempts to ensnare men with a great future before them; and she seemed to be preparing herself in this way, by still keeping up her intriguing habits, for some yet greater scheme which she had in contemplation. She maintained a constant correspondence with her mother, who was now settled at Turin. She went almost every day to the Italian legation, where the Chevalier Rusconi took her apart, and talked to her in quick low tones. She went on mysterious errands into all parts of Paris, made furtive visits to great personages, and kept appointments in the most out-of-the-way places. All the Venetian refugees, the Brambillas, and the Staderinos, and the Viscardis, came to see her secretly, and gave her

scraps of paper covered with notes. She had bought a case of red morocco leather, a great portfolio, with a steel lock worthy of a minister, and in it she stowed away a whole collection of documents. When she drove out, she kept it upon her knees like a muff; and wherever she called she carried it about with her under her arm; and she was even to be met early in the morning, on foot, clasping it against her breast with both her tired hands. The portfolio soon began to look worn, and it split at the seams. Then she buckled straps round it. In her spreading dress, with its long train, and perpetually carrying this shapeless leather case bursting with papers, she looked like some eager attorney haunting the police-courts in the hope of picking up a fee.

Rougon had made several attempts to discover what it was that so engrossed Clorinde's thoughts. One day when he was left alone for a few moments with her famous portfolio, he had not scrupled to pull out of it some letters which were protruding through the gaps. But all that he could find out in one fashion or another seemed to him so incoherent and disconnected that he only smiled at the young woman's pretensions to politics. One afternoon she began quietly to expound to him a vast scheme she had in contemplation. She was going to bring about an alliance between France and Italy, in view of a speedy campaign against Austria. Rougon, who was very much struck for a moment, ended by shrugging his shoulders at the heap of absurdities which found place in her plan. He had in no way modified his opinion about women, and Clorinde willingly accepted the position of a disciple. When she went to see him in the Rue Marbeuf, she assumed an air of submissive humility, and questioned him, and listened to him with the eagerness of a neophyte anxious for instruction. Rougon, on his side, frequently forgot to whom he was speaking, and unfolded to her his theory of government, and talked to her in the most unrestrained and confidential manner. Their conversations together gradually became a regular habit, and he made her his confidante; in her company he consoled himself for the silence which he observed in the presence of his best friends, and he treated her like a discreet pupil, whose respectful admiration had a great charm for him.

During the months of August and September, Clorinde increased the frequency of her visits to Rougon. She began to go to the house in the Rue Marbeuf three or four times a week.

Never before had she shown herself such a gentle, affectionate pupil. She paid Rougon the most flattering compliments, eulogized his genius, and spoke regretfully of the great things which he would have accomplished if he had not been discarded. One day, as an idea flashed through his mind, he said to her with a laugh :

“ There’s something you want me to do for you ? ”

“ Yes, ” she replied, candidly.

But then she quickly reassumed her expression of admiring wonder. Politics were much more interesting than novels, she declared ; and when Rougon turned his back for a moment, she opened her eyes widely, and there flashed in them a passing fiery gleam, which suggested some old feeling of bitterness which still lived on. She often let her hands linger in his, as though she still felt too weak for what she was contemplating, and was waiting till she had drained sufficient of his strength away from him to be able to choke him.

Rougon’s increasing lassitude was a special source of uneasiness to Clorinde. He seemed to be becoming listlessly drowsy and torpid from his state of inactivity. She had made, at first, full allowance for all possible pretence there might be in his demeanour, but she was at length forced to believe that he was really feeling hopeless and discouraged. His motions had grown sluggish, and his voice had become languid ; and sometimes he seemed so listless and indifferent that the young woman felt quite alarmed, and began to ask herself seriously if the great man was not going to quietly accept his relegation to the Senate as a played-out politician.

Towards the end of September Rougon seemed very much pre-occupied ; and in one of his customary conversations with Clorinde, he told her that he was maturing a great scheme. He was growing weary of Paris, he said, and he felt that he needed fresh air. Then all at once he unfolded his plan to her. It was a great scheme of an altogether fresh life ; a voluntary exile to the Landes of Gascony, the clearing of several square leagues of ground, and the founding of a town in the midst of the conquered territory. Clorinde turned quite pale as she listened to him.

“ But your position here ! ” she cried ; “ your prospects ! ”

“ Bah ! castles in the air ! ” he said, disdainfully. “ I see now that I am not cut out for politics.”

Then he again began to dwell upon his pet idea of being a great landowner, with flocks of cattle over which he would be

supreme. But his ambition was now greater. In the Landes of Gascony he would be the conquering king of a new territory. He would have a people under him. He gave Clorinde all kinds of details. For the last fortnight, without saying anything about it to anyone, he had read several technical treatises, and in imagination he had been reclaiming marshes, clearing the soil of stones with the aid of powerful machines, checking the advance of sand-hills by plantations of pines, and dowering France with a tract of wondrously fertile country. All his dormant activity, and all his latent giant's strength awoke within him at the thought of this undertaking. He clenched his fists as though he were already face to face with the rebellious rocks, and was going to cleave them asunder. In imagination his arms were turning over the whole soil at a single stroke, and his shoulders were bearing up houses completely built, which he dropped down on the banks of some river, whose bed he had hollowed out by a single kick of his foot, wherever the situation seemed best suited to him. It all seemed as easy as possible. It would give him the work he so much desired. The Emperor, no doubt, still retained sufficient good will towards him to let him reclaim the waste lands of Gascony. He sprang on to his feet, seeming taller than usual by the sudden bracing up of his big form, and a bright glow coloured his cheeks.

"It is a magnificent idea!" he cried. "I shall give my name to the town, and I, too, shall found a little Empire!"

Clorinde imagined that it was all a mere caprice, a fanciful whim born of the listless stagnation from which he was suffering. But when they met subsequently, Rougon again spoke of his scheme with even greater enthusiasm than before. Every time she came to see him, Clorinde found him in the midst of a litter of maps strewn over his desk the chairs and the carpet alike. One afternoon she was not able to see him, as he was engaged in a consultation with two engineers. Then she began to feel really alarmed. Could he really mean to give her the slip, and go off and found this town of his in the midst of a wilderness? Wasn't it rather some new stratagem he was arranging? However, she relinquished her endeavours to ascertain the truth, and thought it would be best to give the alarm to the coterie.

There was great consternation. Du Poizat was quite overcome. For more than a year he had been out of employment; and on his last journey down to La Vendée his father had taken

a pistol out of a drawer when he had ventured to ask him for ten thousand francs to float a magnificent speculation. So now the poor fellow was beginning to be half-starved again as he was in 1848. Monsieur Kahn, too, showed equal despair. His blast-furnaces at Bressuire were being threatened with speedy ruin, and he felt that he was lost if he could not obtain the concession for the railway within the next six months. All the others, Monsieur Béjuin, the colonel, the Bouchards, and the Charbonnels, were similarly despondent. It could not possibly be allowed to go on, they cried. Really, such conduct on Rougon's part was positively not rational. They must talk to him about it.

A fortnight, however, went away. Clorinde, to whom the whole coterie listened obediently, had come to the conclusion that it would be extremely hazardous to make an open attack upon the great man. So they waited for a fitting opportunity. However, one Sunday evening, towards the middle of October, when all his friends were assembled in the drawing-room in the Rue Marbeuf, Rougon smilingly remarked :

“ You'd never be able to guess what I have got to-day.”

Then he took from behind the time-piece a pink card, and showed it to them.

“ An invitation to Compiègne,” he said.

Just at this moment his valet quietly opened the door, and told him that the gentleman he was expecting had arrived. Rougon excused himself to his friends, and left the room. Clorinde had got up, and was standing, listening. Then, in the midst of the silence, she cried, energetically :

“ He must go to Compiègne ! ”

The friends glanced suspiciously around ; but they were quite alone. Madame Rougon had disappeared several minutes previously. Then, in low tones and with their eyes fixed carefully upon the doors, they began to speak without reserve. The ladies were seated in a circle in front of the fire-place, where a great log was smouldering. Monsieur Bouchard and the colonel were engaged with their everlasting piquet, while the rest of the men had wheeled their chairs into a corner to isolate themselves. Clorinde was standing in the middle of the room. Her head was bent down, and she seemed to be deep in thought.

“ He was expecting someone, then ? ” said Du Poizat. “ Who can it be, I wonder ? ”

The others shrugged their shoulders, by which they meant to express the fact that they did not know.

“Something to do with this idiotic scheme of his, perhaps,” continued Du Poizat. “One of these evenings, you will see, I shall tell him plainly what I think.”

“Hush!” exclaimed Monsieur Kahn, laying his finger upon his lips.

The ex-sub-prefect had raised his voice in an alarming way. For a moment they all strained their ears to listen. Then Monsieur Kahn himself said in a very low tone:

“There is no doubt but what he has engaged himself to us.”

“Say, rather, that he has contracted a debt,” interposed the colonel, laying down his cards.

“Yes, yes; a debt; that is the word,” declared Monsieur Bouchard. “We didn’t mince matters that last day at the Council of State.”

All the others briskly nodded their heads in assent. There was a general outcry. Rougon had ruined them. Monsieur Bouchard protested that if it had not been for his fidelity to him in adversity he would have got his promotion by this time; and, to hear the colonel talk, anyone would have imagined that a commander’s cross had been offered to him, and a post for his son Auguste, on the part of the Count de Marsy, and that he had refused them out of friendship for Rougon. Monsieur d’Escorailles’ father and mother, said pretty Madame Bouchard, were much disappointed at seeing their son remain an auditor when they had been expecting for the last six months to see him promoted to higher rank. Even those who said nothing, Delestang, Monsieur Béjuin, Madame Correur, and the Charbonnels, bit their lips and raised their eyes to heaven with the expression of martyrs whose patience was at last beginning to fail them.

“Well, the long and the short of it is that we are being defrauded,” cried Du Poizat. “But he shall not go away; I answer for that! Is there any sense in a man setting off and struggling with stones when there are such serious interests to keep him in Paris? Are you willing for me to speak to him?”

Clorinde now woke up from her reverie. She waved her hand to obtain silence; and then, when she had opened the door to see that there was no one outside, she said:

“I tell you that he must go to Compiègne!”

Then, as every face was centred upon her, she checked their questions with another wave of her hand.

“Hush! not here!”

She told them, however, that she and her husband had also been invited to Compiègne, and she just let drop the names of Monsieur de Marsy and Madame de Llorentz without seeming to be willing to enter into further details. They would push the great man into power in spite of himself, she said; they would compromise him, if he drove them to it. Monsieur Beulind’Orchère and the whole judicial bench secretly supported him; and Monsieur La Rouquette had confessed that the Emperor, in the midst of the hatred expressed against Rougon by those who surrounded him, had kept absolute silence on the matter, and that whenever the great man’s name was mentioned in his presence, he became serious and his eyes assumed a blank expression.

“It is not we alone who are concerned,” Monsieur Kahn now declared. “If we succeed, the whole country will owe us its thanks.”

Then, raising their voices, they all began to sing the praises of the master of the house. The sound of a voice was now heard in the next room. Du Poizat, impelled by curiosity, pushed open the door as though he were going out, and then closed it again with sufficient deliberation to enable him to look at the man who was with Rougon. It was Gilquin, wearing a heavy overcoat in good condition, and holding in his hand a stout cane with a knob of yellow metal. He was saying in his full voice, and with an exaggerated air of familiarity:

“Don’t send any more, you understand, to the Rue Virginie at Grenelle. I’m at Batignolles now, Passage Guttin. Well, you can always reckon upon me. Good-bye for the present.”

Then he shook hands with Rougon. When the latter returned into the drawing-room, he apologized for his absence, and looked searchingly at Du Poizat.

“A fine fellow, that! You know him, Du Poizat, don’t you? He is going to enlist me some colonists for my new world. By the way, I mean to take you all with me; so you had better be getting your things together. Kahn shall be my Prime Minister. Delestang and his wife shall have the portfolio of Foreign Affairs. Béjuin shall be Postmaster. And I won’t forget the ladies. Madame Bouchard shall be Queen of Beauty, and I’ll give the keys of our store-rooms to Madame Charbonnel.”

He went on joking playfully, while his friends felt very uneasy

and began to wonder if he had possibly heard them through some chink or other. When he proceeded to say that he would decorate the colonel with all the orders in his gift, the latter almost lost his temper. Clorinde was looking at the invitation to Compiègne which she had taken up from off the mantel-piece.

“Do you mean to go?” she asked, with an appearance of unconcern.

“Oh, certainly,” replied Rougon, surprised at the question. “I mean to take advantage of the opportunity to get the Emperor to give me my department.”

Ten o’clock struck, and Madame Rougon came back into the room and served tea.

CHAPTER VII.

TOWARDS seven o'clock on the evening of her arrival at Compiègne, Clorinde was engaged in a conversation with Monsieur de Plouguern near one of the windows in the Gallery of the Maps. They were waiting for the Emperor and Empress before going in to the dining-room. The second batch of the season's guests had scarcely been at the château more than three hours, and as all of them had not yet come down from their rooms, Clorinde was occupying herself by concisely criticising them as they came in one by one. The ladies, in low dresses, and wearing flowers in their hair, put on sweet smiles as soon as they appeared at the door ; while the men, wearing knee-breeches, tightly-stretched black-silk stockings and open waist-coats, preserved a solemn air.

“ Ah ! here comes the Chevalier ! ” said Clorinde. “ He looks very nice, doesn't he ? But just look at Monsieur Beulind'Orchère ! Doesn't he seem just as though he were going to bark ? And, good heavens, what legs ! ”

Monsieur de Plouguern began to grin, much amused by Clorinde's cutting remarks. The Chevalier Rusconi came up and bowed to the young woman with the languid gallantry of a handsome Italian ; then he made the round of the ladies with a series of tender rhythmical reverences. A few yards away, Delestang, looking very serious, was examining the huge maps of the Forest of Compiègne, which covered the walls of the gallery.

“ Whereabouts in the train were you ? ” Clorinde continued. “ I looked out for you in the station, so that we might travel together. Just fancy, I was squeezed up with a whole crowd of men.”

Then she stopped, and began to stifle a laugh with her fingers.

“ How demure Monsieur La Rouquette looks ! ”

“ Yes, indeed ; he's like a simpering school-girl,” returned the senator, sarcastically.

Just at this moment there was a loud rustling heard by the door, which was thrown widely open to give entrance to a lady wearing a dress which was so crowded with bows and flowers and lace that she was obliged to press it down with both hands to be able to get through the doorway. It was Madame de Combelot, Clorinde's sister-in-law. The latter stared at her, and murmured :

“Good gracious !”

Then, as Monsieur Plouguern fixed his eyes upon her own dress of simple tarlatan, worn over an ill-cut skirt of rose-coloured silk, she continued, with an air of the most complete unconcern :

“Ah ! you're looking at my dress, godfather ! Oh, people must take me, you know, just as I am.”

Delestang now quitted the maps, and went to meet his sister, and led her to his wife. The two women were not very fond of each other, and they exchanged rather stiff greetings. Then Madame de Combelot walked off, dragging after her a satin train which looked like a piece of a flower garden, and went on through the clusters of men, who carefully stepped back out of the way of her flood of lace and flounces. Clorinde, as soon as she was alone again with Monsieur de Plouguern, began to refer playfully to the lady's great passion for the Emperor. After the old senator had spoken to her about the absence of any reciprocal feeling on the Emperor's part, she continued :

“Well, there's no great merit in that ; she's so dreadfully scrany. I have been told that some men consider her good-looking, but I can't see where the attraction lies. She has absolutely no figure.”

All the time Clorinde was talking, she kept her eyes upon the door with an air of pre-occupation.

“Ah ! this time it must surely be Monsieur Rougon,” she said.

Then, almost immediately, she continued, while a passing gleam flashed in her eyes :

“Ah, no ! it is Monsieur de Marsy.”

The minister, looking very irreproachable in his black coat and knee-breeches, smilingly stepped up to Madame de Combelot, and while he was paying his compliments to her, he looked round at the assembled guests, blinking his eyes as though he recognised no one ; then, as they began to bow to him, he returned their salutations with an expression of great amiability.

Several of the men stepped up to him, and he was soon the centre of a group. His pale face, with its subtle cunning air, towered over the shoulders that clustered round him.

“By the way,” said Clorinde, pushing Monsieur de Plouguern to the end of the window recess, “I have been relying upon you for some information. What do you know about Madame de Llorentz’s famous letters?”

“Only what all the world knows,” replied the old senator.

Then he began to speak of three letters which had been written, it was said, by the Count de Marsy to Madame de Llorentz nearly five years previously, a short time before the Emperor’s marriage. This lady, who had just lost her husband, a general of Spanish origin, was then at Madrid, engaged in looking after her deceased husband’s concerns. It was in the hey-day of their connection. The count, to amuse her, and prompted also by his own interest in such matters, had sent her some very piquant details concerning certain august personages with whom he was living upon intimate terms. And it was asserted that Madame de Llorentz, who was an extremely jealous woman, had carefully preserved these letters, and kept them hanging over Monsieur de Marsy’s head as an ever-ready means of vengeance.

“She allowed herself to be talked over,” Monsieur de Plouguern said in conclusion, “when he had to marry a Wallachian princess; but, after she had consented to their spending a month’s honeymoon together, she gave him to understand that if he did not return to her feet, she would lay the three terrible letters upon the Emperor’s desk one fine morning. He has taken up his fetters again, and he lavishes the most loving tenderness upon her in the hope that he may get her to give up these dreadful letters.”

Clorinde laughed heartily. The story amused her extremely, and she began to ask all sorts of questions. If the count deceived Madame de Llorentz, would she really carry her threat into execution? Where did she keep those three letters? Was it really in the bosom of her dress, as she had heard people say, stitched up between two pieces of satin? Monsieur de Plouguern, however, could give her no further information. No one had read the letters; but he knew a young man who had, all in vain, made himself Madame Llorentz’s humble slave for nearly six months in the hope of being able to get a copy of them.

“Just look at Marsy,” he continued, “he never takes his eyes

off you. Ah ! I had forgotten ; you have made a conquest of him. Is it true that, at the last soirée at the ministry, he was talking to you for nearly an hour ? ”

The young woman made no reply. She was not listening any longer, but she stood majestic and motionless under Monsieur de Marsy’s steady gaze. Then she slowly raised her head and looked at him, and waited for him to bow to her. He stepped up to her and bowed, and then she smiled upon him very sweetly. They did not exchange a single word. The count went back to the group of men, where Monsieur La Rouquette was talking very loudly, perpetually speaking of him as “ His Excellency.”

The gallery had gradually filled. There were nearly a hundred persons present now ; high functionaries, generals, foreign diplomatists, five deputies, three prefects, two artists, a novelist, two academicians, to say nothing of the court officials, the chamberlains, and the aides-de-camp and equerries. The subdued murmur of voices rose up amid the glare of the chandeliers. Those who were familiar with the château paced slowly up and down, while those who had been asked for the first time felt too timid to venture amongst the ladies. The want of ease which was felt for the first hour or so amongst a company of guests, many of whom were unacquainted with one another, and who found themselves suddenly thrown together in the ante-chamber of the Imperial dining-room, gave to their faces an expression of sullen reserve. Every now and then there were sudden intervals of silence, and heads were turned anxiously round. The furniture of the vast room, the tables, with their straight legs, and the square chairs, seemed to impart additional solemnity to the period of waiting.

“ Here he comes at last ! ” murmured Clorinde.

Rougon had just entered the room. He stood still for a moment, blinking his eyes. He wore his expression of good-natured simplicity ; his back was a little bent, and his face bore a sleepy look. He noticed at a glance the slight tremor of hostility which thrilled through some of the groups of guests at his appearance. Then, shaking hands here and there, he steered his way so as to bring himself face to face with Monsieur de Marsy. The two men bowed to each other, and seemed to be delighted to meet, and began to talk in a very friendly fashion, though they kept their eyes fixed upon each other’s faces like foes who respected each other’s strength. An empty space had

been cleared around. The ladies followed their slightest gestures with interest ; while the men, affecting a great discretion, pretended to look away from them, though every now and then they cast furtive glances towards them. There was much buzzing whispering going on in different corners of the room. What secret plan had the Emperor got in his head ? Why had he brought these two men together ? Monsieur La Rouquette felt sorely perplexed, but he thought he could scent some very grave business. He went up to Monsieur de Plouguern, and began to question him. The old senator gave play to his jocosity.

“ Oh,” he said, “ perhaps Rougon was going to upset Marsy, so it is as well to treat him deferentially. Perhaps the Emperor wanted to see them together, in the hope that something amusing might happen.”

The whisperings now ceased, and there was a general movement. Two officers of the household went about from group to group saying something in low tones. Then the guests, who had all suddenly become serious again, made their way to the door on the left, where they formed themselves into a double line, the men on one side, and the ladies on the other. Monsieur de Marsy posted himself near the door, keeping Rougon by his side ; and the rest of the company ranged themselves in the order of their rank. Then, keeping perfect silence, they continued waiting for another three minutes.

The folding-doors were then thrown widely open. The Emperor, in full dress, and wearing the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour across his chest, came into the room first, followed by his chamberlain-in-waiting, Monsieur de Combelot. He smiled slightly as he stopped before Monsieur de Marsy and Rougon. He began slowly twisting his moustache with his fingers. Then, in an embarrassed tone, he said :

“ You will tell Madame Rougon how extremely sorry we were to hear that she was ill. We should have been very much pleased to see her here with you. We must hope that she will very soon be well again. There are a great many colds about just now.”

Then he passed on. After a couple of steps, he stopped again, and shook hands with a general, asking him after his son, whom he called “ my little friend, Gaston.” Gaston was the same age as the Prince Imperial, but he was already much more vigorous. The rows of guests bowed as the Emperor passed along between

them. When he had got quite to the end, Monsieur de Combelot presented to him the two academicians who had come to court for the first time. The Emperor spoke of a recent work by one of them, certain passages of which, he said, had afforded him the greatest pleasure.

By this time the Empress had also entered the room, attended by Madame de Llorentz. She was dressed very simply in a blue silk dinner-gown, ornamented with white lace. She advanced between the double line with slow steps, smiling, and graciously inclining her bare neck, from which a diamond heart was suspended by a ribbon of blue velvet, towards the ladies. The latter made their reverences to her with much rustling of highly-perfumed skirts. Madame de Llorentz presented a young woman, who seemed deeply moved. Madame de Combelot affected an affectionate familiarity with the Empress.

When the two sovereigns had reached the end of the double line, they retraced their steps ; the Emperor now turning towards the ladies, and the Empress towards the men. There were some more presentations made. No one spoke ; a respectful embarrassment kept all the guests facing each other in silence. Then, when the adjutant-general of the palace came to announce that dinner was served, the two lines broke up, and remarks were exchanged, and there was the sound of cheery laughter.

“Ah ! you don’t want me any longer now !” Monsieur de Plouguern laughed in Clorinde’s ear.

She smiled at him. She had kept in front of Monsieur de Marsy, to force him into offering her his arm, which he had done with a gallant air. There was a slight amount of confusion. The Emperor and Empress went out first, followed by the guests who had been chosen to sit to the right and left of them. To-day, two foreign diplomatists, a young American lady, and the wife of a minister, had been selected for that honour. After these came the other guests in any order they chose, each man giving his arm to the lady he had been pleased to select. The procession at last got slowly under way.

The entrance into the dining-hall was made with great pomp. Five cut-glass chandeliers sparkled above the long table, lighting up the silver centre-pieces representing hunting scenes ; the starting of the stag, the horns sounding the view-halloa, and the hounds seizing the quarry. The silver plates lay round the edge of the cloth like a border of glittering moons, and the covers,

reflecting the blaze of the candles, the glass, with its quivering corruscations, the stands of fruit, and the vases of bright roses, gave a splendour to the Imperial table, whose sheeny brilliance glorified the whole of the huge room.

The procession, after having slowly crossed the Grand Room, entered the dining-hall through the widely-opened folding doors. The men bent down and said a word or two, and then stood erect again, feeling a sort of secret satisfaction of their vanity in this triumphal march, while the ladies, with their naked shoulders bathed in the brilliant light, beamed radiantly. Their long trains, sweeping the ground, and maintaining a wide distance between the successive couples, lent an additional majesty to the procession, to which the rustling of the rich tissues sounded a soft accompaniment. As the door of the dining-room was reached, and the magnificent spectacle of the table came into sight, a military band, hidden from view within an adjoining room, received the company with a flourish, like the signal for commencing a fairy banquet, and, at the sound of it, the men, who were feeling somewhat ill at ease in their short breeches, involuntarily pressed their partners' arms.

The Empress now passed down the room on the right, and remained standing by the centre of the table, while the Emperor, going to the left, took up his position opposite to her. Then, when the guests selected for that purpose had taken their places at the right and left of their Majesties, the others glanced round for a moment, and chose what places they liked. On this particular evening there were covers laid for eighty-seven. It took nearly three minutes before everyone had entered the room and chosen places. The satiny sheen of the ladies' shoulders, the gay flowers in their dresses, and the diamonds sparkling in their hair, gleamed quite picturesquely in the bright glow of light which streamed from the crystal chandeliers. The footmen now took the hats, which the gentlemen had hitherto carried in their hands; and then everyone sat down.

Monsieur de Plouguern had followed Rougon. After the soup had been served, he nudged him with his elbow, as he asked :

“Have you commissioned Clorinde to bring about a reconciliation between you and Marsy?”

Then he looked towards the young woman, who was sitting

at the other side of the table next to the count, to whom she was talking with an air of tender interest. Rougon looked much annoyed, but he merely shrugged his shoulders, without saying anything, and pretended to see something that interested him in another direction. But, in spite of his attempts at indifference, his eyes strayed back to Clorinde, and he observed her slightest gestures, and even the movements of her lips, as though he were trying to discover what she was saying.

“Monsieur Rougon,” said Madame Combélot, who had got as near to the Emperor as she could, “do you recollect that accident when you got a cab for me? One of the flounces of my dress was completely torn away.”

She tried to make herself interesting by going on to tell him how her carriage had been nearly broken in two by the landau of a Russian prince. Then Rougon was obliged to reply; and for a little time the incident was the subject of conversation about the middle of the table. All kinds of accidents were quoted, and, amongst others, there was mentioned the case of a woman, a dealer in perfumes, who had fallen from her horse in the previous week, and had broken her arm. The Empress uttered a slight exclamation of pity. The Emperor said nothing, but listened with a profound expression, while he went on eating slowly.

“Where’s Delestang got to?” Rougon now asked of Monsieur de Plouguern.

They looked about for him, and at last the senator caught sight of him at the end of the table. He was sitting next to Monsieur de Combélot, in the midst of a row of men, listening eagerly to the broad conversation which they were carrying on under the shelter of the noise made by the general talk. Monsieur La Rouquette had been relating a somewhat free story about a laundress from his neighbourhood; the Chevalier Rusconi had been favouring them with some personal criticisms on the women of Paris; while one of the two artists and the novelist, lower down the table, remarked in plain and blunt terms upon the ladies whose too scrany, or over fleshy, arms excited their mockery. Rougon angrily transferred his gaze from Clorinde, who was growing more and more affectionate in her manner towards the count, to her imbecile of a husband, who was smiling sedately at the rather strong food with which his ears were being regaled.

"Why didn't he come and sit with us?" Rougon muttered.

"They seem to be amusing themselves down there, don't they?" said Monsieur de Plouguern.

Then he continued in a whisper :

"I fancy they are making merry at Madame de Llorentz's expense. Have you noticed how her breasts are exposed? There's one of them going to break free altogether, I fancy; the left one, eh?"

But, as he bent round to get a better view of Madame de Llorentz, who was sitting on the same side of the table as himself, some five seats away from him, his face suddenly became very grave. The lady's countenance—she was a beautiful blonde—had just assumed a furious expression; she was quite pale with suppressed rage, and her blue eyes seemed to have turned black as they settled fiercely upon Monsieur de Marsy and Clorinde.

"There's going to be a row," muttered the old senator, in such low tones that even Rougon could not tell what he was saying.

The band was still playing, and the hidden distant music sounded as though it proceeded from the ceiling. Every now and then, when the brass instruments burst out loudly, the guests raised their heads, as though they were looking for the source of the music; then they lost all sound of it, for the far-off strains of the clarionets were quite drowned in the jingling of the silver plate, which the servants were carrying about in great piles. The big dishes gave out a clanking sound, like so many cymbals, and all round the table there was much silent hurrying to and fro. A whole army of servants were flitting about without speaking a word; ushers, in dress-coats and bright blue breeches, carrying swords and three-cornered hats, and footmen with powdered hair, wearing their full-dress livery of green, laced with gold. The dishes were brought in and the wines circulated in proper order, while the heads of the different household services, the controllers, the chief carver, and the chief custodian of the plate, stood round, and superintended all the intricate manœuvrings of this scene of apparent confusion, in which the part to be played by even the most insignificant footman had been carefully arranged beforehand. Meanwhile the private valets of the Emperor and Empress stood behind their Majesties, and waited upon them with an air of decorum.

When the joints were brought in and the Burgundy was poured into the guests' glasses, the chatter of voices grew louder. Among the party of men at the end of the table, Monsieur La Rouquette was now discoursing upon culinary matters and was discussing the amount of cooking which the haunch of venison that had just been served had received. The dishes which had already been put before them had comprised Crecy soup, boiled salmon, fillet of beef with shallot sauce, fowls, partridges with cabbage and oyster patties.

"I'll bet that we shall have stewed cardoons and vegetable-marrow with melted butter," said the young deputy.

"I have seen some cray-fish," remarked Delestang.

When the stewed cardoons and the vegetable-marrows made their appearance, Monsieur La Rouquette was loud in his expressions of triumph. He knew the Empress's tastes quite well, he assured his neighbours. The novelist, however, glanced at the artist, and said, with a slight cluck of his tongue :

"The cooking's only poor."

The artist's face assumed an expression of assent. Then, when he had taken a sip from his glass, he said :

"The wines are exquisite."

Just at this moment, a sudden laugh from the Empress rang so loudly through the room that everyone was silent, and heads were craned forward to discover what had given rise to it. The Empress was talking to the German Ambassador, who was seated at her right. She was still laughing as she uttered some broken words which the guests could not catch. In the midst of the silence caused by the curiosity, a cornet-à-piston, accompanied softly by the bassoons, began to play a solo, a pretty, sentimental air. Then the general murmur of conversation commenced again. Chairs were turned half-round and elbows were rested upon the table, and the guests began to chat freely with each other.

"Will you have a cake?" asked Monsieur de Plouguern.

Rougon shook his head in refusal. For the last moment, he had not been eating anything. The servants had replaced the silver plate by Sèvres china, beautifully decorated in blue and pink. Rougon had passed by all the desert without taking anything more than a small piece of Camembert. He had ceased exercising any constraint over himself, and he gazed openly at Monsieur de Marsy and Clorinde, in the hope, probably, of being able to intimidate the young woman. But she indulged

in such a familiarity of manner with Marsy that she seemed to have forgotten where she was, and to be imagining herself in some small room where a light supper had been served for two. Her beautiful face sparkled with an expression of soft tenderness. She was munching the sweet-meats which the count handed to her, while she went on quite calmly effecting his conquest by her never-ceasing smile. Round about them could be heard suppressed laughs of amusement.

Conversation had now turned upon the subject of fashion. Monsieur de Plouguern mischievously asked Clorinde a question about the new shape of bonnets. Then, as the young woman affected not to hear him, he bent round to address the same question to Madame de Llorentz. But when he saw her angry face, with its clenched teeth and tragic expression of furious jealousy, he did not dare to carry out his intention. Clorinde had now just surrendered her hand to Monsieur de Marsy on the pretext of letting him look at an antique cameo which she was wearing on one of her fingers. She let the count hold her hand while he took off the ring and then put it back again. This seemed to be going too far. Madame de Llorentz, who was nervously playing with a spoon, upset her wine-glass and broke it. One of the servants immediately removed the fragments.

“They will be tearing each other’s hair by-and-bye,” the senator whispered into Rougon’s ear. “Have you been watching them? But, the deuce take me if I can understand Clorinde’s game! What’s she up to?”

Then, as he raised his eyes to his neighbour’s face, he was taken quite aback at the strange change which had taken place in Rougon’s expression.

“What’s the matter with you? Aren’t you feeling well?”

“Oh, yes,” Rougon replied, “but it’s so close here; these dinners last so long. And then there’s a strong scent of musk, which makes me feel a little faint.”

The dinner, however, was now at an end. A few ladies were still nibbling biscuits as they leant back in their chairs. No one moved. The Emperor, who had hitherto preserved silence, now began to make his voice heard, and the guests at the two ends of the table, who had completely forgotten all about His Majesty’s presence, now suddenly began to strain their ears to catch his remarks with an air of respectful complacence. The Emperor was replying to a dissertation from Monsieur Beulin-d’Orchère against divorce. Stopping short and glancing at the very low-

dress of the young American lady who was sitting on his right hand, he said, in his drawling voice :

“ In America I never knew of any but plain wives being divorced.”

A laugh ran through the guests. The remark seemed one of such fine and delicate wit that Monsieur La Rouquette pondered over it carefully in the hope of being able to discover some hidden meaning in it. The young American lady appeared to see some compliment in it, for she bowed to the Emperor in pleased confusion. The Emperor and Empress now rose from their seats. There was a loud rustling of dresses and a noisy trampling round the table ; and the ushers and footmen, standing gravely in line against the wall, alone preserved an attitude of solemn decorum in the midst of the confusion and disorder of the crowd of people who had just dined. The procession was formed anew ; their Majesties at the head, followed by the guests in file, the different couples being kept well apart by the spreading trains of the ladies. They passed through the Guard Room in a state of somewhat panting dignity. Behind them, in the bright light of the crystal chandeliers and amidst the litter of the disordered table, could be heard the rolling of the big drum of the military band finishing the last figure of a set of quadrilles.

Coffee was served that evening in the Gallery of the Maps. One of the prefects of the palace presented the Emperor’s cup on a silver-gilt salver. Several of the guests had already gone off to the smoking-room. The Empress had just retired with some of the ladies to her private drawing-room to the left of the gallery. It was whispered about that she had expressed lively displeasure at the peculiar manner in which Clorinde had conducted herself during dinner. She was trying, during her stay at Compiègne, to introduce a homely decorum into the habits of the court and to cultivate a love for innocent amusements and rural pleasures ; and she manifested a strong personal antipathy to certain extravagances of demeanour.

Monsieur de Plouguern had taken Clorinde aside to preach her a little sermon. His real object, however, was to try and worm a confession out of her. But the girl affected great surprise. What had she done to justify anyone in saying that she had compromised herself with the Count de Marsy ? They had only joked together, nothing more.

“ Just come and look here,” said the old senator.

He pushed back the already slightly open door of a little adjoining room and he showed Clorinde Madame de Llorentz storming away at Monsieur de Marsy. Monsieur de Plouguern had just seen them go into this room. The beautiful blonde was wild with rage and was assailing Marsy in the most unmeasured language, quite regardless of the fact that the loud voice in which she was speaking might possibly bring about a terrible scandal. The count, who was a little pale, was smiling and trying to appease her, talking to her rapidly in low soft tones. The sound of the quarrel had reached the gallery, and the guests who heard it prudently retired from the neighbourhood of the little room.

“Do you want her to publish those famous letters she has all over the château ?” asked Monsieur de Plouguern, who had begun to pace up and down again, after giving his arm to Clorinde.

“That would be fine fun !” she exclaimed with a loud laugh.

Then the old senator, squeezing her bare arm as lightly as though he had been some young gallant, began to scold her again. She must leave all eccentric behaviour to Madame de Combelot, he told her. Then he went on to say that her Majesty appeared very much annoyed with her. Clorinde, who cherished a sincere devotion for the Empress, seemed quite astonished at this. What had she done that could have displeased her ?

As they reached the entrance to the private drawing room, they stopped for a moment and looked in through the doorway, which had been left open. There was a circle of ladies sitting round a large table. The Empress, in the middle of them, was patiently teaching them a round game, while a few of the men were standing behind the chairs and gravely following the lesson.

In the meantime Rougon had been disputing with Delestang at the end of the gallery. He had not ventured to say anything to him about his wife, but he was reproaching him for the indifference with which he had allowed himself to be put off with a room which looked on to the courtyard of the château, and he was trying to induce him to claim a room that looked on to the park. Clorinde now came towards them leaning on Monsieur de Plouguern’s arm.

“Oh, don’t bother me any more about your Marsy !” she

said loudly enough to be heard. "I won't speak to him again to-night. There ! will that satisfy you ?"

This remark quieted everyone. Just at this moment Monsieur de Marsy came out of the little room looking quite gay. He stopped to joke for a moment with the Chevalier Rusconi and then he went into the private drawing-room, where soon afterwards the Empress and the ladies were heard laughing heartily at some story he was telling them. Ten minutes later, Madame de Llorentz also appeared. She looked weary and her hands were trembling. Observing the curious glances which took note of her slightest gestures, she boldly remained in the room and began to talk with the various groups of guests.

There was a growing feeling of weariness amongst the company, and they began to hide slight yawns beneath their handkerchiefs. The evening was the most trying part of the day's proceedings. The newly invited guests, not knowing how to amuse themselves, went up to the windows and looked out into the darkness. Monsieur Beulin-d'Orchère was continuing his dissertation against divorce in a corner of the room. The novelist, who was feeling greatly bored, asked of one of the academicians in a whisper if it was permissible to go to bed. Every now and then the Emperor made his appearance and lounged through the gallery with a cigarette between his lips.

"It has been impossible to arrange anything for this evening," Monsieur de Combelot explained to the little group made up of Rougon and his friends. "To-morrow, after the hunt, the hounds will be given the offal of the stag by torchlight. The next day the artistes of the Comédie Française are coming to play *Les Plaideurs*. There is a talk, too, of some *tableaux vivants* and a charade, which will take place towards the end of the week."

Then he began to give them details. His wife was going to take a part and the rehearsals would begin very soon. He also told them at great length about an excursion which the court had made two days previously to a revolving stone, a druidical monolith, in the neighbourhood of which some excavations were then being carried on. The Empress had insisted upon getting down into the pit which had been dug.

"The workmen," continued the chamberlain, in tones of emotion, "were lucky enough to turn up two skulls in Her

Majesty's presence. No one was expecting such an occurrence, and it caused great satisfaction."

He stroked that black beard of his which had been the source of so much of his success among the ladies. There was a somewhat sawny look about his handsome face, of which he was evidently vain, and he lisped as he spoke.

"But," said Clorinde, "I was told that the actors of the Vaudeville were coming down to perform their new piece. The women wear the most wonderful dresses, and it's excruciatingly funny, I hear."

Monsieur de Combélot assumed a constrained expression.

"Yes," he said, "it was talked of for a moment."

"Well?"

"The idea has been abandoned. The Empress doesn't like that kind of piece."

Just at this moment there was a general movement in the gallery. All the men had come back from the smoking-room and the Emperor was going to have his game at quoits. Madame de Combélot, who prided herself upon being a very skilful player, had just asked him to give her her revenge, for she recollects having been beaten by him during the previous season. She assumed such an air of humble tenderness and made a ceaseless offer of herself with such a meaning smile, that His Majesty, ill at ease and rather alarmed, was often constrained to turn his eyes away from her.

The game commenced. A large number of the guests formed a circle and admiringly criticised the play. The young woman, standing at the end of the long table covered with a green cloth, threw her first quoit, which she placed near the pin, which was represented by a white point. Then the Emperor, showing even greater skill, dislodged it with his own quoit, which slipped into its place. The spectators applauded gently. It was Madame de Combélot, however, who won in the end.

"What have we been playing for, sire?" she asked, boldly.

The Emperor smiled but made no reply. Then he turned round and said :

"Monsieur Rougon, will you have a game with me?"

Rougon bowed and took up the quoits, apologising for his unskilfulness at the game.

A thrill of excitement ran through the two lines of spectators who stood round the table. Was Rougon really about to be restored to favour? The feeling of suppressed hostility of

which he had been conscious ever since his arrival now melted away, and the guests stretched their heads forward and watched his quoits with an air of sympathy. Monsieur La Rouquette, who was now feeling still more perplexed than he had done before dinner, drew his sister aside that he might learn from her what was the true state of affairs, but it did not seem that she had been able to give him any satisfactory information, for he returned to the table again with a gesture of perplexed uncertainty.

“Ah, very good !” murmured Clorinde, as Rougon made a skilful cast.

She darted meaning glances at those of the great man’s friends who were present. The opportunity seemed a favourable one for giving him a lift back into the Emperor’s good graces. She commenced the onset herself, and for a moment or two there was a burst of laudatory remarks.

“By Jove !” exclaimed Delestang, in obedience to the mute command of his wife’s eyes. He could not think of anything else to say.

“And you pretended that you were a very poor player,” said the Chevalier Rusconi, delightedly. “Ah, sire, don’t play for France with him, I beg of you.”

“But Monsieur Rougon would treat France very well, I’m quite sure,” interposed Monsieur Beulin-d’Orchère, with a meaning expression on his dog-like face.

It was a direct hint. The Emperor deigned to smile ; and he laughed good-naturedly when Rougon, feeling quite embarrassed by the stream of compliments that was being poured out upon him, modestly explained :

“I used to play at pitch and toss when I was a school-boy.”

On hearing His Majesty laugh, all the company did likewise ; and for a moment or two the gallery rang with merriment. Clorinde, with her sharp wits, saw that to admire Rougon, who was in fact a very poor player, was equivalent to flattering the Emperor, who was incontestibly his superior. Monsieur de Plouguern, however, had not yet come forward, feeling a touch of jealousy at Rougon’s success. Clorinde went up to him and slightly nudged his elbow as if by accident. He understood her meaning, and broke out into a burst of praise at his colleague’s next throw. Then Monsieur La Rouquette made up his mind to risk everything and he exclaimed :

“Ah ! that was a splendid throw !”

As the Emperor won the game, Rougon asked for his revenge. The quoits again began to glide over the green cloth with a rustling sound like that of dry leaves, when a nurse appeared at the door of the drawing-room, holding the Prince Imperial in her arms. The child, who was then twenty months old, was dressed in a very plain white robe. His hair was in disorder and his eyes were heavy with sleep. When he woke up in this way of an evening he was generally brought to the Empress for a moment or two so that she might kiss him. The young prince looked at the light with the profoundly serious expression characteristic of little children.

An old man, a great dignitary, came forward, dragging his gouty legs along. Bending down, with a senile tremor of his head, he took the baby-prince's soft little hand and kissed it, saying in quavering tones as he did so :

“Monseigneur, monseigneur—”

The child, alarmed at the approach of this parchment-like face, hastily recoiled into his nurse's arms and gave vent to cries of fear. But the old man did not let go his hold, he continued to give expression to his devotion, and it was necessary to release the little hand, which he held tightly to his lips, from his adoring grasp.

“Go away, take him back !” cried the Emperor, impatiently to the nurse.

His Majesty lost the second game, and the deciding one was commenced. Rougon, taking the praises which he received in serious earnest, exerted all his skill. Clorinde now considered that he was playing too well, and, just as he was going to pick up his quoits, she whispered in his ear :

“I hope you are not going to win.”

Rougon smiled. Suddenly a loud barking was heard. It was Nero, the Emperor's favourite hound, which, taking advantage of an open door, had just bounded into the gallery. His Majesty ordered it to be taken away, and a servant had already taken the animal by its collar when the aged dignitary again sprang forward and exclaimed :

“My beautiful Nero ! my beautiful Nero !”

He stooped down upon the carpet in an almost kneeling posture to take the dog in his tremulous arms. He pressed its head against his breast and kissed it as he said :

“I beg of you, sire, not to send him away ; how handsome he is !”

Then the Emperor consented that the dog should remain, and the old man redoubled his caresses. The hound, unlike the prince, showed no sign of fear but licked the dry old hands that fondled him.

Rougon, in the meantime, was making slips in his play. He had thrown a quoit so clumsily that the cloth-covered circle of lead flew into the corsage of a lady who, with a deal of blushing, drew it out from the midst of her laces. The Emperor won the game, whereupon the company delicately gave him to understand that he had gained a well-fought and cleverly won victory, and His Majesty seemed quite affected by it and went off with Rougon, chatting to him as though he wanted to console him for his defeat. They strolled down to the end of the gallery, leaving the body of the room free for a little dance which was being arranged.

The Empress, who had just left the private drawing-room, was manifesting her gracious desire to do everything she could to banish the increasing feeling of dulness which was growing up among the guests. She had proposed playing at some round game, but it was getting late, and the company seemed to prefer a dance. All the ladies were now assembled in the Gallery of the Maps. A messenger was sent to the smoking-room to summon the men who were still hiding there. As the dancers took up their positions for a set of quadrilles, Monsieur de Combelot obligingly seated himself at the piano. It was a mechanical one, with a little handle to the right of the key-board, which the chamberlain, with a serious expression, began to turn round.

“Monsieur Rougon,” said the Emperor, “I have heard some talk of a work you are engaged upon; a comparison of the English constitution with our own. I might be able to supply you with some useful documents.”

“Your Majesty is very kind. But I am contemplating another design; a very great one indeed.”

Rougon, finding his sovereign in such a kindly disposed humour, was desirous of profiting by it, and he unfolded his plan at length to the Emperor, and dwelt upon his dream of cultivating some part of the Landes, of clearing several square leagues of soil, founding a town, and conquering as it were a new country. As he spoke, the Emperor turned upon him his usually expressionless eyes, in which there now shone a glistening light. He said nothing, and merely made signs with his head every now and then. When Rougon at last finished, he said:

"Yes, perhaps—it is worth thinking about."

Then, turning towards Clorinde, her husband and Monsieur de Plouguern, who were standing in a group near at hand, he said :

"Monsieur Delestang, come and give us your opinion. I have preserved the most pleasant recollection of my visit to your model farm of La Chamade."

Delestang stepped forward ; but the little group which was clustering round the Emperor was now obliged to retreat into one of the window recesses. Madame de Combelot, lying half fainting in Monsieur La Rouquette's arms, had, in the whirl of the waltz, just swept her long train round his majesty's silk stockings. At the piano Monsieur de Combelot was quite enjoying the music he was producing, and he turned the handle round more rapidly than before, swaying his handsome head about, and every now and then casting his eyes down towards the case of the instrument, as though surprised at the deep notes which escaped from it at certain turns of the handle.

"I have succeeded in producing some magnificent calves this year, by a fresh crossing of strains," said Delestang. "Unfortunately, during your Majesty's visits, the stalls and folds were under repair."

Then the Emperor began to speak of agriculture, and cattle-breeding, and manures. He talked slowly and spasmodically. He had entertained a high esteem for Delestang since his visit to La Chamade ; and the system which the latter had introduced of his staff of farm-hands living in common, and sharing in a certain amount of the profits, and being entitled to a super-annuation allowance, evoked his especial commendation. There was a community of ideas and humanitarian principles between them, which enabled them to grasp each other's thoughts as they talked together, by the utterance of a mere word or two.

"Has Monsieur Rougon spoken to you about the plan he has formed ?" the Emperor asked.

"Oh, yes !" answered Delestang. "It is a magnificent idea, and affords a chance of trying experiments on a very grand scale."

He showed genuine enthusiasm on the subject. He was greatly interested in pig-breeding, he said. The best strains were dying out in France. Then he observed that he was engaged in perfecting a new plan for the improvement of meadow-lands ; but to make it fully successful, large tracts of country

would be necessary. If Rougon succeeded, he would go and join him and put his system into execution. Then he suddenly stopped short. He had just caught sight of his wife's eyes fixed earnestly upon him. As soon as he had begun to express approval of Rougon's scheme, she had bit her lips, and turned pale and angry looking.

"Come, my dear," she said to him, motioning towards the piano.

Monsieur de Combelot's fingers had grown cramped, and he was opening and shutting his hands to remove the stiffness. Then, as with the resigned smile of a martyr he prepared to commence a polka, Delestang hastened forward and offered to take his place; an offer which he politely accepted with the air of giving up a post of honour. Delestang began to turn the handle, and commenced the polka. But the music now sounded differently; he lacked the easy action and the flexible supple wrist of the chamberlain.

Rougon was anxious to get some definite expression of opinion from the Emperor. His Majesty, who really seemed impressed with the scheme, now asked him if he contemplated establishing large industrial colonies, and said that he should be glad to grant a strip of land and some tools to each family. Moreover, he promised to show Rougon some plans of his own, which he had noted down on paper, for the establishment of a place of this kind, where the houses were all of uniform construction, and where every want had been provided for.

"Certainly, I sympathize entirely with your Majesty's ideas," said Rougon. "We can do nothing without your assistance and authority. It will doubtless be necessary to expropriate certain villages, and it will have to be stated that it is done for the public good. I shall also have to busy myself in launching a company to provide the requisite funds. A word from your Majesty will be necessary—"

The light in the Emperor's eyes grew dim; but he continued to sway his head about. Finally, in muttered and indistinct tones he said :

"We will see—we will talk about it."

Then he walked away, and passing sluggish steps through the quadrille-party. Rougon put on a cheerful countenance, as though he felt sure of obtaining a favourable answer, and gradually it was buzzed about amongst the grave and staid men who did not dance that Rougon was going to leave Paris,

and intended to put himself at the head of a great expedition to the south. Then they began to congratulate him, and he was smiled upon from one end of the gallery to the other. There was not a trace left of the hostility which had been manifested against him when first he arrived. Now that he was going to exile himself, they all felt that they could shake hands with him without running any risk of compromising themselves. It was a genuine relief for many of the guests. Monsieur La Rouquette, quitting the dancing party, discussed the matter with the Chevalier Rusconi, with the pleased air of a man completely set at his ease.

"It's the right thing he's doing! He will make a great success down there!" he said. "Rougon is an extremely able man, but he's deficient in tact where politics are concerned."

Then he grew quite emotional over the Emperor's kindness. His Majesty, he said, showed as much love for his old servants as if they were old mistresses. He had thrills of affection and tenderness for them even after the most violent ruptures. It was some secret softening of heart, no doubt, that had prompted him to invite Rougon to Compiègne. Then the young deputy proceeded to cite other incidents which did honour to His Majesty's kindness of nature. He had given four hundred thousand francs to pay the debts of a general who had been ruined by a ballot girl; he had bestowed eight hundred thousand upon one of his old comrades at Strasburg and Boulogne as a wedding present, and he had laid out nearly a million for the benefit of the widow of a high functionary.

"His purse is at every one's disposal," he said in conclusion. "He only allowed himself to be chosen Emperor so that he might be able to benefit his friends. It makes me shrug my shoulders when I hear the republicans reproaching him for his big civil list. He would exhaust ten civil lists in doing good. All the money he gets comes back to France again."

While they talked in low tones to each other, Monsieur La Rouquette and the Chevalier Rusconi followed the Emperor with their eyes. The latter had made the complete round of the gallery. He had adroitly threaded his way through the dancers, advancing silently and unaccompanied through the clear spaces which their respect opened out for him. As he passed behind the bare shoulders of a lady who was sitting down, he stretched his neck slightly forward and cast an oblique glance at them.

"And he has such a mind, too!" the Chevalier Rusconi said in a whisper. "He is an extraordinary man!"

The Emperor had come quite close to them. He lingered near them for a moment, hesitating and gloomy. Then he seemed to feel a passing inclination to go up to Clorinde, who was just now very merry and was looking extremely beautiful; but she fixed her eyes on him boldly, and this seemed to frighten him, for he began to walk again, holding his left arm behind his back, and twisting the ends of his waxed moustache with his right hand. Then, seeing Monsieur Beulin-d'Orchère in front of him, he went up to him and said :

"You are not dancing."

The judge confessed that he could not dance, that he had never danced in his life. Then the Emperor replied encouragingly :

"Oh, that doesn't matter! That needn't keep you from dancing now."

These were his last words for the evening. He quietly made his way to the door, and disappeared.

"Yes, indeed, he is a very extraordinary man," said Monsieur La Rouquette, repeating the Chevalier Rusconi's phrase. "They think a great deal of him abroad, don't they?"

The Chevalier, with diplomatic reserve, replied only with vague signs of his head. He allowed, however, that the eyes of all Europe were fixed upon the Emperor. A word from the Tuilleries would make the neighbouring thrones tremble.

"He is a prince who knows how to hold his tongue," he added with a smile, the subtle irony of which escaped the young deputy.

They now both returned to the ladies and invited partners for the next set of quadrilles. For the last quarter of an hour one of the aides-de-camp had been turning the handle of the piano. Both Delestang and Monsieur de Combelot now sprang forward and offered to take his place. The ladies however cried out :

"Monsieur de Combelot! Monsieur de Combelot! He does it much the best!"

The chamberlain thanked them for their compliment with a pleasant bow, and began to turn the handle with a quite professional air. It was the last quadrille. Tea had just been taken into the private drawing-room. Nero, who had made his appearance from behind a couch, was being glutted with

sandwiches. The guests were gathering into little groups and were chatting together familiarly. Monsieur de Plouguern had carried off a bun to a side table, where, while he ate it and sipped his tea, he explained to Delestang, with whom he divided the bun, how it was that he, so well known to hold Legitimist opinions, had come to accept the invitation to Compiègne. The reason was a very simple one, he said. He could not refuse his presence to a government which had rescued France from anarchy.

"This bun is very delicious," he remarked, cutting short what he was saying.

His caustic tongue was always ready to wag sharply when he was at Compiègne. He spoke of most of the ladies present with a bluntness of expression which called up blushes to Delestang's face. The only one for whom he showed any respect was the Empress. She was a saint, he said, and set an example of devotion. He asserted that she was a Legitimist and would have recalled Henri V. if she had had the free bestowal of the throne. Then, for a moment or two, he dwelt upon the sweetness of religion. Just as he was sliding off again into the narration of an indelicate story, the Empress retired to her own rooms, followed by Madame de Llorentz. When she reached the door of the drawing-room, she made a low courtesy to the company, to which all the guests replied by silently bowing.

The rooms began to grow empty. The remaining guests talked in louder tones, and exchanged parting shakes of the hand. When Delestang looked about for his wife to go up with her to their room, he could not find her anywhere. At last, Rougon, who was helping him to search for Clorinde, discovered her sitting by the side of Monsieur de Marsy on a short couch in the little room where Madame de Llorentz had been so violently angry with the count after dinner. Clorinde was laughing loudly. When she saw her husband she rose up from the couch.

"Good evening, Monsieur le Comte," she said, "without ceasing laughing. "You will see to-morrow, at the hunt, if I don't win my bet."

Rougon glanced after her as her husband led her away on his arm. He would have liked to accompany them as far as the door of their room to ascertain what bet it was which she spoke of, but Monsieur de Marsy, who showed him the greatest

politeness, detained him, and he could not get away. When at last he was free to depart, instead of going up to his room, he took advantage of an open door and went out into the park. It was a very dark October night, without a star or a breeze, and everything was black and dead. He could scarcely distinguish the path in front of him. Holding his hat in his hand he let the sharp night air play on his brow for a moment or two. This freshened him greatly. Then he stood listlessly looking at a brightly lighted window on the left of the frontage. The lights in all the other windows were being gradually extinguished, and soon this was the only gleaming spot to be seen outside the sleeping château. The Emperor, thought Rougon to himself, is sitting up. Then he fancied he could distinguish his shadow passing across the blind, showing a huge head beyond which extended the ends of his moustache. It was followed by two other shadows ; one, a very slight one, and the other so big that it blocked up all the light. In this latter shadow Rougon clearly recognised the gigantic silhouette of one of the agents of the secret police, with whom His Majesty frequently closeted himself for hours at a time. The slight shadow again appeared, and Rougon thought it seemed like a woman's. Then there was nothing more to be seen, and the glow of the window shone out again uninterruptedly. Perhaps, thought Rougon, the Emperor is now considering my scheme for clearing a tract of unsettled land and the founding of an industrial town, where the extinction of pauperism might be attempted on a grand scale. He knew that Napoleon frequently came to important determinations during the night. It was at night that he signed his decrees, wrote his manifestoes and dismissed his ministers. Presently Rougon began to smile. He had recalled to mind a story of the Emperor wearing a blue apron and a cap made out of a journal, and pasting up paper at three francs the piece in one of the rooms of Trianon in which he intended to house a mistress ; and he pictured him now in the act of cutting out wood-cuts and sticking them up neatly with a little brush.

Then Rougon found himself raising his arms and involuntarily exclaiming aloud :

“ Ah ! it's his friends who have made him what he is ! ”

At last he hurried back into the château again. He was beginning to feel very cold, especially about the legs, which his knee-breeches left uncomfortably exposed.

A little before nine o'clock the next morning Clorinde sent

Antonia, whom she had brought with her to Compiègne, to ask Rougon if she and her husband might come to breakfast with him. He had already had a cup of chocolate brought up to him, and he waited till they came before drinking it. Antonia preceded them, carrying a large silver salver upon which two cups of coffee had been brought up into their bedroom.

“Ah ! this will be more cheerful !” exclaimed Clorinde as she came into the room. “You have got the sun on your side. You are much better off than we are.”

She began to inspect the suite of rooms. It consisted of an ante-chamber, on the right of which there was a door which opened into a room for a valet. Beyond this was the bedroom, a large chamber hung with cream-coloured chintz bearing a pattern of big red flowers. There was a huge square mahogany bed and an immense grate in which a fire of logs was blazing.

“Well, you ought to have complained !” said Rougon. “I would not have put up with rooms looking on to the court-yard. Ah ! if people don’t assert themselves—I was talking to Delestang about it last night.”

The young woman shrugged her shoulders as she replied :

“Oh ! he would make no objection if they wanted to lodge me in a garret !”

She now proceeded to investigate the dressing-room, all the fittings of which were of Sèvres china, white and gold, and bearing the Imperial initial. Then she went and looked out of the window. A slight cry of surprise and admiration burst from her lips. Stretching away for leagues in front of her, the lofty trees of the forest of Compiègne spread out like a rolling sea, and their huge towering heads rose and fell in gentle billows, till they faded out of sight in the distance. Beneath the pale sun of the October morning, the forest looked like a sea of gold and purple, or a gorgeously embroidered mantle reaching far as the eye could see.

“Come, let us have breakfast !” said Clorinde.

They cleared a table on which stood an inkstand and a blotting-book, and they found it rather amusing to wait upon themselves. The young woman, who was in a very merry mood, said that when she awoke, it seemed to her like awaking in an inn, an inn kept by a prince, after a long journey in a dream. This haphazard kind of breakfast, served upon silver salvers, delighted her like some adventure in an unknown

country. Delestang was looking in wonder at the quantity of wood burning in the grate. Keeping his eyes fixed upon the flames, he said, with an air of abstraction :

“ I have calculated that they burn fifteen hundred francs’ worth of wood every day in the château. Fifteen hundred francs’ worth ! Don’t you think it’s rather a large quantity, Rougon ? ”

Rougon, who was slowly sipping his chocolate, only nodded his head by way of reply. He was pre-occupied with Clorinde’s gay animation. She seemed to him this morning to be glowing with an extraordinary brilliance of beauty, and her big eyes seemed to be glistening with a combative gleam.

“ What was the bet you were talking about last night ? ” he asked her abruptly.

She began to laugh, and made no reply. Then, as he pressed his question, she said :

“ You will see presently.”

Rougon now began to manifest some vexation, and spoke harshly to the young woman. It was an outburst of real jealousy, and the veiled allusions in which he indulged at first soon grew into direct accusations. She had made a perfect spectacle of herself, he said ; she had let her hand rest in Monsieur de Marsy’s for more than two minutes. Delestang, in the meanwhile, was tranquilly steeping some long strips of toast in his coffee.

“ Ah ! if I were your husband ! ” Rougon cried.

Clorinde got up, and went and stood behind Delestang, resting her hands upon his shoulders.

“ Well,” she asked, “ supposing you were my husband, what then ? ”

Then she stooped down and stirred Delestang’s hair with her warm breath, as she said to him :

“ He wouldn’t be as nice as you are, would he, dear ? ”

Delestang turned his head round, and, by way of answer, kissed the hand that lay on his left shoulder. He looked at Rougon with an expression of emotion and embarrassment, blinking his eyes as though he wished him to understand that he was really going a little too far. Rougon nearly called him a fool. Clorinde now made a sign to him over her husband’s head, and he followed her to the window, against which she leant. For a moment she remained quite silent, her eyes fixed on the far-spreading prospect. Then she abruptly asked him :

"Why do you want to leave Paris? Don't you care for me any longer? Listen now; I will be quite steady, and follow your advice, if you will give up this plan of exiling yourself in that horrid, outlandish place."

Rougon became very grave at this proposition. He began to dwell upon the great plans which he felt it his duty to carry out; and it was impossible now, he said, for him to withdraw. While he was speaking, Clorinde tried in vain to read the real truth in his face. He seemed, indeed, quite determined to go.

"Very well then; you don't care about me any longer," continued the young girl. "So I feel at liberty to follow my own inclinations entirely. Well, you will see!"

She left the window without showing any vexation, and she began to laugh again. Delestang, who still seemed to find the fire a source of great interest, was trying to calculate approximately the number of grates in the château. Clorinde, however, broke in upon his meditations, and said that she had only just got time to dress, unless she was to miss the hunt. Rougon accompanied her and her husband into the corridor, a long conventional passage with a thick green carpet. Clorinde amused herself as she went along by reading on the different doors the names of the guests, which were written on small cards bordered with slight strips of wood. When she had got quite to the end of the corridor, she turned round, and, thinking that Rougon looked perplexed, and as if he wished to call her back, she stood still and waited smilingly for a moment or two. Rougon, however, went back into his room, and closed the door roughly behind him.

The general breakfast was served early that morning. There was a deal of conversation in the Gallery of the Maps concerning the weather, which was all that could be wished for the hunt. There was a good clear light, and the air was calm and still. The court carriages set out a little before noon. The meet was at the King's Well, a great open space where the roads crossed in the middle of the forest. The Imperial hunting-train had been waiting there for more than an hour; the huntsmen in crimson breeches and great laced hats; the dog-keepers shod in black shoes with silver buckles to enable them to run with ease amongst the brushwood; and the carriages of the guests invited from the neighbouring châteaux, all of them drawn up in a semi-circle in front of the hounds, while in

the centre were groups of ladies and men in hunting-dress, like figures out of some old picture of a hunt in the time of Louis XV. brought to life on this mild October morning. The Emperor and the Empress did not follow the hunt, and as soon as the hounds were slipped, their carriage turned down a bye-road and returned to the château. Many of the others followed their example. Rougon had at first tried to keep up with Clorinde, but she spurred on her horse so wildly that he was left behind, and, in disgust, he determined to return, furiously angry at seeing the young woman galloping far away in the distance at the end of an avenue, side by side with Monsieur de Marsy.

Towards half-past five o'clock, Rougon received an invitation to go down and take tea in the private apartments of the Empress. This was a favour that was usually granted to men of interesting and witty conversation. He found Monsieur Beulin-d'Orchère and Monsieur de Plouguern already there. The latter was relating an immoral story in carefully-chosen words, and his narrative had an enormous success. Only a few of the hunting-party had as yet returned. Madame de Combelot came in, saying she was dreadfully tired. When the company asked her how matters had gone off, she replied with an affectation of technical terms :

“ Oh, the animal led us a pretty dance for more than four hours. Then he got fresh wind and took to the open for a little time, but at last he was killed near the Red Pool after a splendid run.”

The Chevalier Rusconi gave an additional detail with an expression of uneasiness.

“ Madame Delestang’s horse bolted,” he said. “ She disappeared in the direction of Pierrefonds, and nothing has since been seen or heard of her.”

Then he was overwhelmed with questions, and the Empress seemed much distressed. The Chevalier said that Clorinde had kept up a tremendous pace all the time, and that her behaviour had excited the admiration of the most experienced huntsmen. Then all at once her horse had vanished up a side lane.

“ She had been whipping the poor animal violently,” interposed Monsieur La Rouquette, who was burning to get a word in. “ Monsieur de Marsy galloped off to her assistance, and he, also, has not been seen since.”

Madame de Llorentz, who was sitting behind Her Majesty,

now rose from her seat. She fancied the company were looking at her and smiling, and she became quite pale. The conversation now turned upon the dangers of hunting. One day, some one said, the stag had taken refuge in a farm-yard, and had then turned round and charged the hounds so suddenly that a lady had had her leg broken in the midst of the confusion. Then the company began to indulge in various suppositions. If Monsieur de Marsy had succeeded in checking Madame Delestang's horse, perhaps they had both dismounted for a few minutes' rest ; there were a large number of shelter-places, huts and sheds and arbours in the forest. It seemed to Madame de Llorentz that this suggestion only excited still greater smiling, and that the company were watching her jealous anger askance. As for Rougon he kept quite silent, but he beat a feverish tattoo on his knees with the tips of his fingers.

The Empress had given orders that when Clorinde returned she should be asked to come and have some tea. All at once there was an outburst of exclamations. The young woman appeared at the door, with a flushed, smiling, radiant face. She thanked Her Majesty for the concern which she showed about her, and then she continued quite calmly :

“ I am so sorry. You really shouldn't have made yourselves uneasy. I made a bet with Monsieur de Marsy that I would be in at the death before he was. If it hadn't been for that provoking horse of mine—”

Then she broke off and said laughingly :

“ Well, we've neither of us lost, after all.”

They made her tell them the details of her adventure, and she did so without the least sign of confusion. After galloping along madly for ten minutes, her horse, she said, fell, but without herself being in any way hurt. Then, as she was trembling a little from the excitement, Monsieur de Marsy took her into a shed for a few moments.

“ Ah, we guessed that ! ” exclaimed Monsieur La Rouquette. “ You said a shed, didn't you ? I myself mentioned an arbour.”

“ It must have been very uncomfortable for you,” said Monsieur de Plouguern, mischievously.

Clorinde, without ceasing to smile, replied slowly as though she were mentally dwelling upon some pleasant far-away recollection :

"Oh dear no! I assure you not. There was some straw, and I sat down. It was a great shed full of spiders' webs. It was growing dark, too. Oh! it was very droll!"

Then looking in Madame de Llorentz's face and speaking in a still more deliberate manner, she added :

"Monsieur de Marsy was very kind to me."

While Clorinde had been telling her story, Madame de Llorentz had been pressing two of her fingers violently against her lips. Upon hearing Clorinde's concluding details she shut her eyes and seemed racked with anger. She remained thus for a minute longer, and then, feeling that she could not contain herself any further, she left the room. Monsieur de Plouguern, who was very curious to find out what she was going to do, slipped away after her. When Clorinde saw Madame de Llorentz disappear, an involuntary expression of victory broke out upon her face.

The conversation now turned upon other subjects. Monsieur Beulin-d'Orchère began to speak of a scandalous law-suit which was exciting a deal of public interest. It was a wife's demand for separation from her husband on the ground of the latter's impotence ; and he related certain details in such delicately chosen words that Madame de Combelot did not fully understand what the matter at issue really was, and she asked him for fuller explanations. The Chevalier Rusconi then afforded the company great pleasure by softly singing to them some popular Piedmontese love songs, which he afterwards translated into French. In the midst of one of the songs, Delestang entered the room. He had just returned from the forest, where for the last two hours he had been scouring the roads in search of his wife. His strange appearance excited a general smile. The Empress seemed to have taken a sudden friendship for Clorinde for she made her sit down at her side and talked to her about horses. Pyrame, the horse which the young girl had been riding, was a hard goer, and the Empress said that the next day she should have César.

Since Clorinde's arrival, Rougon had been standing near one of the windows, pretending to be greatly interested in the lights which were gleaming in the distance to the left of the park. As he stood in this position no one could detect the slight quivering of his features. He remained standing and looking out into the darkness for a long time. Then at last he turned round, looking quite unruffled and unconcerned, as Monsieur de

Plouguern came back into the room and stepped up to him, whispering in his ear in a voice of satisfied curiosity :

“There has been a terrible scene ! I followed her out of the room. She met Marsy at the end of the corridor. They both went into a room together, and I heard Marsy telling her roundly that she bored him to death. She rushed out again like a mad woman and went off in the direction of the Emperor’s study. I feel sure she went to put those famous letters upon his desk.”

Just at this moment Madame de Llorentz re-appeared. She was very pale ; her hair was straying over her brow and she was breathing very quickly. She resumed her seat behind the Empress with the despairing calmness of a patient who has just undergone some terrible operation which may have a fatal result.

“I’m sure she has taken the letters,” said Monsieur de Plouguern, examining her.

Then, as Rougon did not seem to understand him, he left him and stooping down over Clorinde began to tell her his story. The young girl listened to him with delight and her eyes glistened with an expression of pleasure. It was not till the approach of the dinner-hour, as the company were leaving the Emperor’s private room, that Clorinde appeared conscious of Rougon’s presence. Then she took his arm and said to him, as Delestang followed on behind them :

“Well now, you see— If you had been more amiable this morning, I shouldn’t have nearly broken my legs.”

In the evening, the offal of the stag was distributed to the hounds in the courtyard by torchlight. As the procession of guests left the dining-room, instead of immediately returning to the Gallery of the Maps, they dispersed through the reception-rooms in front of the château, the windows of which were all wide open. The Emperor took up his position upon the central balcony, which afforded accommodation for a score of other persons.

Down below, two rows of footmen in full livery and with their hair powdered formed a long double line from the entrance to the gate. Each of them held a long pike at the end of which blazed lighted pieces of tow placed in cups of spirits of wine. These lofty bluish flames seemed to be dancing in the air like floating blazes, and glared through the darkness without illuminating it, rendering nothing visible except the double row of scarlet waistcoats to which they gave a purplish tinge. On

both sides of the court-yard there was a crowd of citizens and their wives from Compiègne, a mass of pale faces dimly seen through the darkness, amongst which the flaring tow every now and then showed up some hideous-looking countenance. In the centre, in front of the steps of the château, lay the offal of the stag heaped up on the pavement. It was covered up by the extended skin of the animal, the head lying in front. At the other end, near the gate, the hounds were drawn up in charge of the huntsmen ; and the dog-keepers, in their green livery and long white cotton stockings, were waving torches. In the bright ruddy glow, broken by the clouds of smoke that rolled away towards the town, the hounds could be seen crowding together, and panting heavily with gaping mouths.

The Emperor remained standing. Every now and then his face showed blank and impenetrable in the flashing of the torches. Clorinde had watched his every movement during dinner without detecting anything more than a melancholy weariness, the moodiness of an invalid suffering in silence. Once only she fancied she saw him casting a side glance from his half-closed eyes at Monsieur de Marsy. On the balcony he still kept moody and depressed, stooping a little and twisting his moustache. Behind him, the guests were standing on the tips of their toes to get a better view.

“Come, Firmin !” he said impatiently. Then the huntsmen sounded the “Royale.” The hounds barked and yelped, strained out their necks and reared themselves up on their hind legs in the midst of a terrible uproar. Then, as a keeper held up the stag’s head in sight of the wild pack, Firmin, the chief huntsman, who was standing upon the steps, let his whip drop ; and finally the hounds, which had been waiting for this signal, bounded in three great leaps across the court-yard, panting with hungry excitement. Firmin, however, raised his whip again. The hounds, suddenly checking themselves a few yards away from the stag, squatted down upon the pavement, while their backs quivered with excitement and their throats shook with their barks. But they were obliged to return again to the gate, where they assumed their previous position.

“Oh, the poor animals !” said Madame de Combelot, with an air of languid compassion.

“Splendid !” cried Monsieur La Rouquette.

The Chevalier Rusconi applauded loudly. Several of the ladies bent forward in their excitement, while their lips

quivered and their hearts throbbed with their desire to see the hounds devouring their prey. Would they not be allowed to have the bones at once? they asked.

“No, not just yet,” said several voices.

Firmin had again twice dropped and then raised his whip. The hounds were growing exasperated and were foaming at the mouth. The third time, Firmin did not raise his whip again. The valet had rushed away, carrying off the stag’s head and skin. The hounds rushed forward and seized upon the offal, and their furious barking subsided into a dull growl of enjoyment. The bones could be heard cracking. Then general satisfaction was expressed upon the balcony and at the windows. The ladies smiled in a chilly fashion and clenched their white teeth, and the men looked on with glistening eyes, while their fingers found occupation in twisting the tooth-picks they had brought away from the dining-room. In the courtyard there was now a sudden scene of brilliance. The huntsmen sounded a flourish on their horns; the dog-keepers waved their torches, and a blaze of Bengal fires flamed in the darkness, bathing the serried heads of the town’s-folk in a flood of glowing light.

The Emperor now turned his back upon the scene, and retired. Noticing Rougon standing close to him, he seemed to wake up from the moody reverie in which he had been absorbed since dinner.

“Monsieur Rougon,” he said, “I have been thinking about that scheme of yours. There are difficulties in the way—many difficulties.”

Then he stopped. He opened his lips to speak again, but closed them without saying anything. Just as he went away, however, he added :

“You must remain in Paris, Monsieur Rougon.”

Clorinde, who heard him, indulged in a gesture of triumph. The Emperor’s remark immediately spread through the company, and the faces of the guests grew grave and anxious, as Rougon slowly made his way through them towards the Gallery of the Maps.

Down below in the court-yard, the hounds were finishing their bones. They flung themselves wildly on the top of one another to reach their prey. They presented a heap of writhing backs, white and black, surging and struggling like a living sea, and roaring hungrily. Their jaws rose and fell feverishly, and they bolted rapidly whatever they could seize. Every now

and then, there were little quarrels which ended in a loud howl. One large hound, with a magnificent head, finding himself too far away from the quarry, stepped backwards and then sprang with a leap into the middle of the pack. He forced his way through the others, and won for himself a great strip of the stag's entrails.

CHAPTER VIII.

SEVERAL weeks went by. Rougon had relapsed into his life of lassitude and ennui. He never made any reference to the Emperor's order that he should remain at Paris. He only spoke of his disappointment and of the alleged obstacles which stood in the way of his making a settlement in some uncleared corner of the Landes. Upon these topics he talked continually. What obstacles could there possibly be? he asked. For his own part, he could not see any. He even went as far as to show some irritation against the Emperor, from whom it was impossible, he complained, to obtain any explanation whatever. Perhaps, he suggested, His Majesty felt afraid lest he should be obliged to come forward with a subvention for the proposed expedition.

As the days went by, Clorinde's visits to the Rue Marbeuf increased in frequency. She seemed every afternoon to expect to hear some piece of news from Rougon, and she gazed at him in surprise on finding him continually silent. Ever since her visit to Compiègne she had been living in the hope of a sudden triumph. She had imagined to herself a series of dramatic scenes including furious anger on the part of the Emperor, Monsieur de Marsy's utter fall and disgrace, and the great man's immediate restoration to power. She no doubt imagined that Madame de Llorentz's exhibition of the letters would have this result; and so her astonishment was unbounded when, at the end of a month's time, she still saw the count remaining in office. She began to feel a contempt for the Emperor, who seemed incapable of avenging himself. If she had been in his place, she said to herself, she would not have quietly put up with such an insult. What could he be thinking about in that everlasting silence he preserved?

Clorinde, however, had not yet abandoned all hope. She still had an intuition that some unforeseen turn in the wheel of events would bring round the triumph she was desiring. Monsieur de Marsy's influence must certainly be shaken. Rougon

manifested towards her all the watchful attention of a husband who is afraid of being betrayed. Ever since his strange out-breaks of jealousy at Compiègne, he had kept up a most paternal surveillance over her, had plied her with moral dissertations and had done his best to see her every day. The young woman smiled, feeling certain now that he would not leave Paris. Towards the middle of December, however, after weeks of drowsy listlessness, he again began to speak of his great scheme. He had consulted some bankers, and he had hopes of being able to do without the Emperor's assistance. Once more he buried himself in a mass of maps and plans and technical treatises. Gilquin, he said, had already got together a band of more than five hundred workmen who had expressed their willingness to go out with him. They would do as the first instalment of his future people. Then Clorinde, feeling quite provoked, set all the coterie of friends at work.

It was a tremendous undertaking. Every one took a part in it; and they held whispered councils in the corners of Rougon's own drawing-room every Sunday and Thursday evenings. They divided the various difficult matters amongst themselves. Every day they scattered about through Paris, invincibly determined upon acquiring influence and support. No assistance was too insignificant for their acceptance; the most trifling help might be useful. They availed themselves of everything, and they drew whatever advantage they could from most trivial events, working hard the whole day from the first thing in the morning to the last thing at night. They enlisted their friends as accomplices, and then the friends of these. All Paris seemed to be sharing in the intrigue. In the most out-of-the-way quarters of the city there were people who were yearning for Rougon's triumph without being able to say why. The little band, which only comprised some ten or twelve persons, was influencing all Paris.

"We are the coming government," said Du Poizat seriously.

He drew parallels between themselves and the men who had established the second empire.

"I shall be Rougon's Marsy," he added.

A pretender alone was nothing but a name. It wanted a band of supporters to establish a government. Twenty stout fellows of ambition are stronger than a mere principle, and when with their ambition they can combine a principle as well they become invincible. Such were Du Poizat's asser-

tions. He himself spent his time in perambulating about Paris and in dropping into newspaper offices, where he smoked his cigar and did what he could to covertly undermine Monsieur de Marsy's reputation. He always had some secret little story to relate about him, and he accused him of ingratitude and egotism. Then, when he had contrived to bring in Rougon's name, he dropped vague hints and promises of the rewards and presents and subventions which the latter would shower down upon every one if ever he got into the position to do so. In this way he contrived to get a number of hints and stories and references inserted in the journals, which kept the public mind continually occupied with the great man's personality. Two small papers published an account of a visit to the house in the Rue Marbeuf, and others spoke of Rougon's famous work respecting the English constitution and that of 1852. After a hostile silence of two years, there was a rising murmur of eulogy and commendation, and Rougon's popularity seemed to be awaking again. Du Poizat, too, devoted himself to other intrigues of a more secret kind, such as the purchase of certain people's support and the promotion of gambling at the Bourse upon the prospects of Rougon's return to office.

"Let us only think of him," he often said with that frankness of his which was distasteful to the greedier members of the coterie. "Later on, he will think of us."

Monsieur Beulin-d'Orchère was not a very subtle intriguer. He unearthed a scandalous affair to the detriment of Monsieur de Marsy, with the result of its being immediately suppressed. But he showed greater shrewdness by hinting that he would probably become Minister of Justice if ever his brother-in-law got back to power, and this intimation brought all his brother judges over to his side.

Monsieur Kahn put himself at the head of another company of auxiliaries, consisting of discontented financiers, deputies and functionaries, and any other malcontents whom he came across. He had a docile lieutenant in Monsieur Béjuin, and he even availed himself of the services of Monsieur de Combelot and Monsieur La Rouquette, without these two gentlemen having the least idea of the amount of useful work he was making them do. He himself energetically went about amongst the official world, plotting and working in the attempt to make his propaganda find its way even into the Tuileries, and covertly labouring for days in the hope that some remark which he let

fall might be repeated from mouth to mouth till at last it reached the Emperor himself.

But it was the women who manifested the most passionate enthusiasm. There were strange underplots and complicated intrigues connected with their share in the business, the full extent and influence of which will always remain unknown. Madame Correur now always called pretty Madame Bouchard "my little pet." She took her off with her, on a visit to the country, she said ; and for a week Monsieur Bouchard was left to lead a bachelor's life, and Monsieur d'Escorailles was reduced to the necessity of spending his evenings at the minor theatres. Du Poizat met the two ladies one day in the company of some gentlemen who wore decorations, but he said nothing about his having done so. Madame Correur now occupied two sets of rooms : one in the Rue Blanche, and the other in the Rue Mazarine. The latter set was very elegantly furnished. Madame Bouchard used to go there in the afternoons, taking the key from the doorkeeper of the house. It was said that the young woman had made an effectual conquest of a high functionary while she was crossing the Pont Royale one rainy morning with her petticoats pulled up.

The rest of the coterie, too, went busily up and down, doing all that lay in their power. Colonel Jobelin betook himself regularly to a café on the boulevards to catch his old friends, officers, whom he questioned between games of piquet ; and when he had enlisted the sympathies of half a dozen, he rubbed his hands gleefully in the evening and declared that the whole army had joined the good cause. Monsieur Bouchard devoted himself to a like task in the government-offices, and he gradually instilled a strong feeling of enmity against Monsieur de Marsy into the clerks. He even won over the office-boys, and he made the whole staff sigh for the golden age of which he had hinted the advent to his friends. Monsieur d'Escorailles devoted himself to winning over the wealthy young men he knew, extolling Rougon's broad views, and his tolerance of certain faults, and his love of daring and boldness. The Charbonnels, too, as they sat on the benches of the Luxembourg, where they went every afternoon, awaiting the issue of their interminable law-suit, found a means of enlisting the sympathy and support of the petty independent folk who lived in the neighbourhood of the Odéon.

Clorinde was not content with being the guiding spirit of the

coterie, but she was also engaged in very elaborate operations of her own, of which she never spoke a word to anyone. She was to be seen more frequently than ever, hurrying through equivocal neighbourhoods, carelessly dressed and tightly hugging her big official-looking portfolio, split at the folds and kept together by pieces of string. She gave her husband the most extraordinary commissions to perform, which he carried out with the docility of a sheep, without in the least understanding them. She sent Luigi Pozzo about carrying letters ; she asked Monsieur de Plouguern to give her his escort, and she kept him waiting out in the street for her by the hour. Once she thought for a moment of getting the Italian government to interfere in Rougon's favour. Her correspondence with her mother, who was still living at Turin, was full of the wildest ideas. She had dreams of turning Europe topsy-turvy, and she used to go to the Chevalier Rusconi's twice a day to meet his diplomatic acquaintances. In this strangely conducted campaign of hers, she also frequently remembered her beauty, and then she would make her appearance, on certain afternoons, neatly and becomingly dressed and with a majestic demeanour. And when her friends, seeming quite surprised at her appearance, told her that she looked lovely, "I have good need to be," she replied, with an air of resigned weariness.

She kept herself in reserve as an irresistible argument. To surrender herself appeared to her in no very serious light. She herself had so little enjoyment in it, that it seemed to her merely a matter of business like any other, but perhaps a little more wearisome. When she had come back from Compiègne, Du Poizat, who had heard of her adventure at the hunt, had tried to find out on what terms she was with Monsieur de Marsy. He had some vague idea of betraying Rougon in favour of the count, if Clorinde was likely to become the latter's all-powerful mistress. Clorinde, however, manifested considerable irritation, and denied the truth of any such supposition. He must think her a very silly person to suspect her of such a connection, she said. She even gave him to understand that she should never even see Monsieur de Marsy again. Still she allowed that she might possibly have thought earlier of becoming his wife. A sensible man, she said, never really troubled himself to advance the fortunes of his mistress. And, besides, she had other schemes in her head now.

"There are often many ways," she said sometimes, "of getting

at what you want, but of all those ways, there is never more than one that is pleasant. I myself have to put up with a good many things I don't like."

She used to keep her eyes constantly fixed upon Rougon, as though she were dreaming of fattening him up with power for some future feast. She still manifested her disciple-like submission, and kept herself in the background with a cajoling humility. Rougon himself seemed to be quite unconscious of all that was going on about him. In his drawing-room, on Sundays and Thursdays, he often consulted the cards like a fortuneteller, keeping his face bent closely over them, and not seeming to hear any of the buzzing talk, that was going on behind his back. The coterie of friends discussed his affairs, and made signs to each other over his head, and plotted by his fireside just as though he had not been in the room. He kept himself so quiet, and seemed so unconcerned and unconnected with what they were whispering about, that at last they began to talk in louder tones, smiling at his abstraction. When they turned the conversation on to the subject of his return to power, he burst out and swore that he would not move even if he knew that a triumph awaited him at the end of the street; and he did, indeed, shut himself up more than ever in his own house, and affected an absolute ignorance of what was going on in the outside world. The little house in the Rue Marbeuf, from whence streamed such a flow of feverish propaganda, was the abode of silence and drowsiness, on the threshold of which those who frequented it cast glances of intelligence at one another as a warning to leave, outside, the scent of battle which they carried in the folds of their garments.

"I tell you he's drawing us all out," Du Poizat exclaimed. "He listens to all we say. Just look at his ears in the evening; you can see that they are on the strain."

This was the subject of their conversation when they went away together at half-past ten. It really was not possible, they said, that the great man should be unaware of the devotion of his friends. The ex-sub-prefect repeated that he was playing the part of God Almighty. This wily Rougon, he declared, was like a Hindoo idol, and lived squatting in a state of pleased self-satisfaction with his hands folded across his belly, smiling and sanctimonious in the midst of a crowd of faithful believers who cut themselves to pieces in his worship. The rest of the coterie declared that this comparison was a very just one.

"But I will keep my eye upon him, you may depend upon that," Du Poizat said in conclusion.

It was all to no purpose studying Rougon's face. It was always blank and unruffled, almost child-like. Perhaps, after all, they said, there was no deception about his appearance. Clorinde, indeed, for her part, much preferred that he should remain quite inactive. She was afraid that if they compelled him to open his eyes to what was going on, he might thwart their plans. They were working for his advancement, as it were, in spite of himself. By some means or other, forcibly if necessary, they meant to thrust him into some position of high authority. Then they would have a settlement.

Matters, however, seemed to advance but slowly, and the company of friends began to grow impatient. Du Poizat showed especial irritation. They did not openly reproach Rougon with all that they were doing for him, but they assailed him with allusions and hints and meaning remarks. The colonel used to come sometimes to the evening receptions with his boots white with dust. He had not had time, he said, to go home and change them. He was quite knocked up with running about all the afternoon on foolish errands for which he should probably never get any thanks. On other evenings Monsieur Kahn, with eyes that were heavy with fatigue, complained of the late hours he had been compelled to keep for a month past. He was going about a great deal, he said, not for pleasure, indeed, but because it enabled him to meet certain people upon certain business. Then Madame Correur would begin to relate moving stories; telling them for instance, of some poor young women, a widow of the highest character, with whom she used to go and sit, and regretting that she now had no power to assist her. If she were the government, she said, she would take good care to prevent such cases of injustice. Then all the coterie would break out into their own sorrows, and each one would lament his or her present situation, and compare it with what it would have been if they had not behaved in the foolish soft-hearted way they had done, and pour out endless complaints which were accentuated by meaning glances at Rougon. To rouse him, they even went so far as to praise Monsieur de Marsy. At first Rougon preserved all his unruffled tranquillity. He still showed no signs of understanding. But after a few evenings of this kind slight twitchings passed over his face at certain remarks which were made

in his drawing-room. He expressed no annoyance, but he pressed his lips together as though he were pricked by some invisible needle. Then he became so restless and uneasy that he abandoned his card-tricks. He could not accomplish them successfully any longer, and he began to spend his time in pacing slowly about the room, talking, and suddenly hastening away from the side of his friends when they began to launch their veiled reproaches at him. Every now and then he turned quite white with anger, and he seemed to be forcibly holding his hands behind his back to restrain himself from turning the whole crew out-of-doors.

“ My children,” said the colonel one evening, “ I shall not come here again for a fortnight. It will do him good to sulk by himself for a little time and see how he can manage to amuse himself without us.”

Rougon, who had been thinking of closing his doors against them all, now felt very much hurt at the way in which his friends had abandoned him. The colonel had kept his word, and others had followed his example. The drawing-room looked very empty ; there were always five or six of the circle absent. When one of them reappeared after a prolonged absence, the great man asked him if he had been unwell, but with an air of surprise he answered in the negative and gave no explanation. One Thursday not a single person came. Rougon spent the whole evening alone, in pacing up and down the big room, with his hands behind his back and his head bent down. For the first time he felt the strength of the bond which attached him to his friends. With shrugs of his shoulders he expressed his feeling of contempt as he thought of the stupidity of the Charbonnels, the envious rage of Du Poizat and the suspicious tenderness of Madame Correur. Nevertheless, he felt a craving, the jealous craving of a master secretly pained by their slightest infidelities, to see these friends of his, whom he held in such light esteem, and to lord it over them. At the bottom of his heart he was touched by their foolish behaviour and he loved their faults. They now seemed to be part of his being, and he felt himself diminished and incomplete when they held aloof from him. As they still continued to absent themselves, he ended by writing to them, and he even went to see them at their own houses to make peace with them as matters seemed to be becoming serious. Life at Rougon’s house in the Rue Marbeuf was now made up of chronic quarrelling, a series of

constantly recurring ruptures and patched-up reconciliations. The great man and his friends all felt very bitter.

Towards the end of December there was a particularly serious outbreak. One evening, without anyone quite knowing why, one remark had led to another and they had ended by a very angry scene. For nearly three weeks afterwards the meetings were broken up. The truth is that the coterie was beginning to lose all hope. Their most earnest efforts seemed to have no appreciable result. The situation for a long time past appeared to have undergone no change, and the band of friends had abandoned all hope of some sudden catastrophe rendering Rougon necessary. They had anxiously awaited the opening of the Corps Législatif, but the ceremony had gone off without any other incident than the refusal of two republican deputies to take the oath. Monsieur Kahn, who was the shrewd man of the group, no longer hoped now for any advantage from the course of general politics. Rougon in his weary irritation, was occupying himself more energetically than ever with his colonizing scheme, as though to conceal the feverish twitchings of his face, which he could no longer keep in its previous sleepy tranquillity.

"I don't feel very well," he said sometimes. "My hands, you see, are trembling. My doctor has ordered me to take exercise. I am out-of-doors all day."

He did, indeed, go out a great deal now, and he was to be met in the streets with his hands swinging by his side and his head in the air, absorbed in thought. When anyone stopped him and questioned him, he said he had been tramping about all day. One morning when he returned home to breakfast, after a walk in the direction of Chaillot, he found a gilt-edged visiting-card, on which was written Gilquin's name. The card was very dirty and bore the marks of greasy fingers. He rang for his servant.

"Did the person who left this card leave any message?" he asked.

The servant, who was new to the house, smiled.

"It was a gentleman in a green overcoat. He was very pleasant and he offered me a cigar. He only said that he was a friend of yours."

Just as he was leaving the room, he turned round and said :

"I think there's something written on the back of the card."

Rougon turned it round and read these words written in

pencil : "Can't wait. Will call again this evening. Very important ; a strange business." Rougon threw down the card with a careless air. After he had breakfasted, however, the expression, "a strange business" recurred to his mind and haunted him, and ended by rendering him quite impatient. What could this "strange business" of Gilquin's be ? Since Rougon had charged the ex-commercial traveller with the execution of sundry obscure and complicated commissions, he saw him regularly once a week in the evening. Never before had Gilquin made his appearance in the morning. The matter in hand must consequently be something out of the common. Rougon, quite at a loss to guess what it could be, found himself burning with impatience, and although he could not help feeling that it was ridiculous, he resolved to go out and try to meet Gilquin before the evening.

"Some story of a tipsy man, I daresay," he thought to himself as he went through the Champs Elysées. "Well, at any rate, I shall satisfy myself."

He set out on foot, wishing to carry out the directions of his doctor. It was a lovely day ; a bright sunny January morning. Gilquin appeared to have removed from the Passage Guttin, for his card bore the address, Rue Guisarde, Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Rougon had an immense amount of trouble in finding this very dirty street, which is situated near Saint-Sulpice's. At the bottom of a dark alley he discovered a woman lying in bed, who called out to him in a voice which quavered with fever :

"Monsieur Gilquin ! I don't know whether he's in. It's the door on the left on the fourth floor, right up at the top."

When Rougon reached the fourth floor, he saw Gilquin's name inscribed on the door surrounded by arabesques representing flaming hearts pierced by arrows. But it was to no purpose that he knocked ; behind the door he could hear nothing save the tick-tack of a cuckoo-clock and the mewing of a cat. He had expected all along that he was coming on a vain errand, but, all the same, he felt glad that he had come. It had relieved him. He went down the stairs again, feeling more composed, and said to himself that he could very well wait till the evening. When he got away, he slackened his steps and crossed through the Saint-Germain market, and then went along by the Seine, with no definite goal in view, but resolved to walk home although he was already feeling a little tired. As he reached the slope of the Rue Jacob, he thought of the

Charbonnels. He had not seen them for ten days. They were sulking with him. Then he determined to go and see them for a few minutes and offer them his hand. The afternoon was so warm that it made him feel quite softened and tender.

The Charbonnels' room in the Hôtel du Périgord overlooked the yard, a gloomy well of a place which smelt like a dirty sink. It was a large, dark room, with rickety mahogany furniture, and curtains of faded red damask. When Rougon went in, Madame Charbonnel was folding up her dresses and laying them at the bottom of a big trunk, while her husband was perspiring, and straining his arms in cording another trunk, a smaller one.

"Halloo! are you off?" Rougon asked, with a smile.

"Yes, indeed," answered Madame Charbonnel, drawing a deep sigh. "This time we've quite made up our minds to have done with it."

However, they gave him a hearty welcome, and appeared to feel quite flattered at seeing him in their room. All the chairs were littered over with clothes, and bundles of linen, and hampers with splitting sides. Rougon sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Oh, don't trouble yourselves!" he said, good-naturedly; "I'm very comfortable here. Go on with what you're doing, and don't let me disturb you. Are you going by the eight o'clock train?"

"Yes, by the eight o'clock train," Monsieur Charbonnel replied. "That gives us just six more hours to spend in this Paris of yours. Ah! we sha'n't forget it in a hurry, Monsieur Rougon!"

Then he, who generally spoke so little, launched out into a flow of bitter invective, and even shook his fist at the window, as he declaimed against a town where, he said, you couldn't see clearly in your room at two o'clock in the afternoon. That dirty light that filtered in through that narrow well of a yard was Paris! But, thank heaven, he was going to see the sun again in his garden at Plassans! Then he looked carefully round to see that he was forgetting nothing. He had bought a railway time-table in the morning, and he pointed to a fowl wrapt up in a piece of grease-spotted paper, which they were going to take with them to eat during their journey.

"Have you emptied everything out of the drawers, my dear?" he asked. "My slippers were in the night-table.

There are some papers, I think, fallen behind the chest of drawers."

Rougon, from his seat on the bed, watched, with a feeling of tightness at his heart, the preparations of these old folks, whose hands trembled as they made up their packages. Their emotion seemed to him like a silent reproach. It was he who had kept them in Paris, and their sojourn there was ending in complete failure, and a veritable flight.

"You are making a mistake," he said.

Madame Charbonnel broke out into a gesture of supplication, as if to beseech him to be silent.

"Don't begin to make us any promises, Monsieur Rougon," she said, sharply. "They could only bring all our unhappiness over again. When I think that we've been here two years and a half! Two years and a half, good heavens, in this hole of a place! My left leg will never be well again as long as I live. I have slept on the far side of the bed, and that wall there behind you fairly streams with water at night. Oh, I couldn't tell you all we've gone through! It would be much too long a story. And we've spent a ruinous amount of money! See, yesterday I was obliged to buy this great trunk to carry away the things we have worn out while we have been in Paris; the wretchedly sewn clothes that they charged us most extortionately for, and the linen which came back from the laundress's in rags. Ah! I sha'n't be sorry to have seen the last of your laundresses! They ruin everything with their acids."

Then she threw a bundle of old dresses into the trunk, as she exclaimed :

"No, this time we are certainly going. I think it would kill me to be kept here an hour longer."

Rougon, however, insisted upon talking about their law-suit. Had they had any bad news? he asked. Then the Charbonnels told him, almost crying as they did so, that the property of their cousin Chevassu was certainly lost to them. The Council of State was on the point of authorising the Sisters of the Holy Family to receive the legacy of five hundred thousand francs. Their last remaining hope had been dashed away upon hearing of the arrival of Monseigneur Rochart in Paris, where he had come, for the second time, to hurry the matter forward.

Then Monsieur Charbonnel suddenly ceased to struggle with the cordage of the smaller trunk, and seemed overwhelmed with a rush of emotion, as he cried out, in a broken voice :

"Five hundred thousand francs ! Five hundred thousand francs !"

They both of them seemed utterly dispirited. They sat down, the husband upon the trunk, and the wife upon a bundle of linen, in the middle of the litter of the room. Then they began to pity themselves in a mournful strain ; and when one stopped the other began. They recalled their affection for their cousin Chevassu. How fond they were of him ! As a matter of fact, they had not seen him for more than seventeen years before his death. But, just now, they indeed felt a genuine sorrow for him, and they believed that they had shown him every kind attention during his illness. Then they began to accuse the Sisters of The Holy Family of disgraceful scheming. They had inveigled the confidence of their relation, had kept him apart from his friends, and had brought a constant pressure to bear upon his mind, weakened by sickness. Madame Charbonnel, who was really a very devout woman, went so far as to relate a dreadful story, according to which, after their cousin Chevassu had signed his will at the dictation of a priest, he had been frightened to death by this priest showing him the devil standing at the foot of his bed. And as for the Bishop of Faverolles, she said, that it was a miserable part he was playing, in depriving of their property a couple of honest people, who were esteemed throughout Plassans for the integrity they had shown in getting together a little competency in the oil business.

"But the case isn't hopeless yet," said Rougon, seeing that they were wavering. "Monseigneur Rochart isn't God Almighty. I myself have not been able to do anything for you lately ; I've had so much else to occupy me. But let me just find out exactly how matters stand. I don't mean to let them make a prey of us."

The Charbonnels looked at each other, and slightly shrugged their shoulders.

"It's really no use troubling about it, Monsieur Rougon," murmured the husband.

But Rougon persisted, swearing that he would make every effort in their favour, and declaring that he would not let them go off in this way.

"It's really no use your troubling yourself about it," repeated the wife in her turn. "You would only give yourself a lot of bother for nothing. We spoke of you to our solicitor,

but he only laughed at us and said you were of no use now against Monseigneur Rochart."

"And if you're of no use, what's the good of troubling yourself?" asked Monsieur Charbonnel. "We'd better give it up."

Rougon had bent his head down. The remarks of these old people cut him like lashes. Never before had his powerlessness been the source of such cruel pain to him.

"No; we are about to go back to Plassans," continued Madame Charbonnel. "It is much the wisest thing we can do. But we are not going away feeling any grudge against you, Monsieur Rougon! When we see Madame Felicité, your mother, again, we shall tell her that you would have cut yourself in pieces for us. And if anyone questions us, you may feel quite sure that we shall never say a word against you. No one can be expected to do more than they are able, can they?"

This was the last stroke. Rougon pictured to himself the Charbonnels reaching their distant home in the provinces. As soon as they told their news all the little town would be yelping at himself. It would be a personal failure, a defeat from which it would take him years to recover.

"Stay here!" he exclaimed. "I wish you to stay. We will see if Monseigneur Rochart can gobble me up at a mouthful!"

He broke out into a disturbing laugh which quite alarmed the Charbonnels. They continued to resist for some time, but at last they consented to remain in Paris for another week, but not a day longer. Monsieur Charbonnel began laboriously unknitting the cords with which he had fastened the smaller trunk, and his wife lighted a candle, although it was scarcely three o'clock, so that she might see to put the linen and clothes into the drawers again. When Rougon left them he pressed their hands affectionately and renewed his promises to do all he could to assist them.

Before he had gone ten yards down the street, he already began to repent of what he had done. Why, he asked himself, had he persuaded the Charbonnels to stay, when they were so anxious to be off? It would have been an admirable opportunity of freeing himself of them. Now he was more committed than ever to bringing about a successful issue of their suit. He was especially vexed with himself for the motives of vanity which, as he realised, had influenced him. They seemed to

him to be quite unworthy of a man of his ability and power. However, he had promised, and he must do what he could. He went down the Rue Bonaparte, walked along the quay, and then crossed the Port des Saints Pères.

The weather was still mild, but a rather sharp breeze was blowing along the river. As he was buttoning his coat on the middle of the bridge, he saw a stout lady immediately in front of him who barred his way. She was heavily dressed in furs, and he recognised her voice as Madame Correur's.

"Ah ! is that you ?" she said in mournful tones. " Well, as I've met you, I'll shake hands with you ; but you wouldn't have seen me at your house for at least another week. You haven't been acting like a friend."

Then she began to reproach him for not having got her something that she had been asking him for, for months past. She was still busying herself about the girl Herminie Billecoq, a former pupil of Saint Denis, whom her seducer, an officer, was willing to marry, if some good soul would only give her the regulation dowry. And all the other ladies, Madame Correur said, gave her no peace. The widow Leturc was anxiously waiting for her tobacco-agency, and the others, Madame Chardon, Madame Testanière, and Madame Jalaguier, came to her every day to relate their troubles and to remind her of the promises which she had made them.

" I was counting upon you when I made them," she said in conclusion, " Oh, you've left me in a nice hole ! Well, I am going now to ask the Minister of Public Instruction for a scholarship for little Jalaguier. You promised me that scholarship, you know."

She heaved a deep sigh as she continued :

" We are obliged to go tramping about all over now that you refuse to do anything for us."

The wind was inconveniencing Rougon a little, and he bent his back and began to look at the Port Saint Nicholas below the bridge. As he listened to Madame Correur he watched with interest some men unloading a barge laden with sugar-loaves, which they rolled down a gangway made of a couple of planks. A crowd of three hundred people were viewing the operation from the quays.

" I am nobody now, and I can do nothing," Rougon said. " It is wrong of you to feel a grudge against me."

" Stuff and nonsense !" replied Madame Correur, scoffingly ;

"I know you well enough. You can be anything you want as soon as you like. Don't be a humbug, Eugène!"

Rougon could not keep from smiling. The familiarity of Madame Mélanie, as he used to call her in former days, brought back to him recollections of the Hôtel Vanneau, when he had not a pair of boots to his feet, and was conquering France. He forgot all the reproaches which he had addressed to himself on leaving the Charbonnels.

"Well, well," he said, good-naturedly, "what is it you have to tell me? But don't let us stand here. It is quite freezing. As you are going to the Rue de Grenelle, I will walk with you to the end of the bridge."

Then he turned round and walked by the side of Madame Correur, but without offering her his arm; and the lady began to tell him her troubles at great length.

"Well, after all, I don't so much mind about the others. Those ladies can very well wait. I would not bother you, and and I should be as merry as I used to be—you remember, don't you?—if I hadn't such big troubles of my own. One can't help getting bitter over them. I'm still dreadfully bothered about my brother. Poor Martineau! His wife has made him completely mad; he has got no feeling left."

Then she entered upon a minutely detailed account of a fresh attempt at reconciliation which she had made during the previous week. In order, she said, to find out exactly what her brother's disposition towards her was, she had sent to Coulonges one of her friends, that very Herminie Billecoq, whose marriage she had been trying to effect for the last two years.

"Her travelling expenses have cost me a hundred and seventeen francs," she continued. "Well, how do you think they received her? Madame Martineau threw herself between her and my brother, foaming at the mouth and crying out that I was sending a crew of street-walkers to them, and that she would have them arrested by the gendarmes. My poor Herminie was still in such a state of tremble when I went to meet her at the Montparnasse station that we were obliged to go into a café and get something."

They had now reached the end of the bridge. The way farers were jostling against them. Rougon tried to console Madame Correur, and thought of all the kind things that he could say.

"It is extremely annoying. But you will see your brother

will make it up with you by-and-bye. Time puts everything straight."

Then, as she still kept him standing there at the corner of the footway, in the midst of the uproar of the passing carriages, he began to walk again, and slowly returned up the bridge. Madame Correur followed him, saying :

"When Martineau dies, his wife is quite capable of burning any will he may leave behind him. The poor, dear fellow is nothing more than skin and bones. Herminie says he is looking dreadfully ill. I am terribly bothered about it all."

"Well, you can't do anything now," said Rougon, with a vague gesture ; "you must wait."

Then she stopped him again half-way across of the bridge, and, lowering her voice, she continued :

"Herminie has told me a strange thing. It seems that Martineau has gone in for politics now. He is a republican. At the last elections he threw the whole neighbourhood into excitement. It has given me quite a shock. He may be getting into trouble."

There was a short pause, during which Madame Correur glanced searchingly at Rougon. The latter's eyelids quivered slightly as though he wanted to avoid her gaze. Then he said quite tranquilly :

"Oh, don't make yourself uneasy. You have friends, haven't you ? Well, reckon upon them."

"You are the only person I reckon upon, Eugène," she replied in a low, tender voice.

Rougon seemed moved. He glanced at her, and there was something touching to him about her plump neck and her painted face which she struggled to keep still beautiful. She seemed the personification of his youth.

"Yes, reckon upon me," he said, pressing her hands. "You know very well that I am always on your side."

He accompanied her as far as the Quai Voltaire. When she left him he made his way across the bridge, and then, slackening his steps, again began to watch the unloading of the sugar-loaves upon the Port Saint-Nicholas. He stood and leant his elbows upon the parapet for a moment. But the sugar-loaves rolling down the gang-way, the greenish river flowing beneath the arches of the bridge, the crowd of idlers and the houses, all seemed to grow hazy and to disappear, and he soon fell into a deep reverie. He was absorbed in a cloud of confused thoughts

into which Madame Correur largely entered. He no longer felt any sorrowful regrets ; he was dreaming of becoming very great and powerful, so that he might satisfy the wishes and desires of those about him to the fullest extent.

A shiver awoke him from his wrapt quiescence. He was trembling with cold. The night was beginning to fall, and the breeze from the river was stirring up little clouds of white dust upon the quays. He felt very tired as he made his way along the Quai des Tuileries. His determination to return home on foot suddenly deserted him. All the passing cabs, however, were full, and he was on the point of relinquishing the hope of getting one, when he saw a driver pull up his horse just in front of him. A head was thrust out of the window of the vehicle. It was Monsieur Kahn's.

"I was just going to see you. Get in. I will take you home, and we can talk as we go."

Rougon got into the cab. He had scarcely sat down before the ex-deputy launched out into a stream of excited words amidst the jolting of the vehicle while the horse trotted sleepily on.

"Ah, my friend, I have just had such a proposition made to me ! You would never be able to guess it ! I feel as though I were choking !"

Then he lowered the glass of one of the windows, saying, as he did so :

" You have no objection, have you ? "

Rougon lay back in a corner of the cab, watching through the open window the grey wall of the garden of the Tuileries. Monsieur Kahn, very red in the face, and gesticulating spasmodically, continued :

" I have been following your advice, you know. For the last two years I have been struggling persistently. I have seen the Emperor three times, and I have reached my fourth petition on the subject. If I haven't succeeded in getting the grant for the railway for myself, I have, at anyrate, prevented Marsy getting it for the Western Company. I manœuvred so as to keep matters at a standstill till we should be the stronger party again, as you advised me to do."

He stopped for a moment, as his voice was drowned in the dreadful clatter made by a wherry loaded with iron which was jolting along the quay. Then, when the cab had got clear of the wherry, he continued :

“ Well, just now as I was sitting in my study, a man whom I don’t know, but who is a great contractor, it appears, made his appearance, and calmly proposed to me, in the name of Marsy and the directors of the Western Railway Line, that, if I would make over to these gentlemen shares to the value of a million francs, the necessary authorisation should be granted to me. What do you think of that ? ”

“ The terms are a little high,” said Rougon, with a smile.

Monsieur Kahn gave a jerk of his head and crossed his arms.

“ Oh, you’ve no idea of the coolness of these people,” he continued. “ You ought to have heard the whole of my conversation with the contractor. In consideration of the million’s worth of shares, Marsy undertakes to support me, and to bring my claim to a successful issue in a month’s time. When I began to speak of the Emperor, the contractor only laughed, and he gave me to understand that if the Emperor was my only support, I might just as well give the whole thing up at once.”

The cab now turned into the Place de la Concorde. Rougon emerged from his corner, looking warm again, and with a bright colour on his cheeks.

“ And did you show this fine gentleman the door ? ” he asked.

The ex-deputy looked at him for a moment with an expression of great surprise, without making any reply. His anger had suddenly vanished. He lay back in his corner of the cab, and abandoned himself indolently to the jolting motion.

“ Ah, no ; one doesn’t show people like that the door without a little reflection. And, besides, I want to take your advice. For my own part, I confess, I am inclined to accept the offer.”

“ Never, Kahn ! ” cried Rougon, hotly. “ Never ! ”

Then they began to discuss the matter. Monsieur Kahn quoted figures. No doubt, he said, a commission of a million was enormous, but he went on to show that this might easily be made up by certain methods of proceeding. Rougon, however, would not listen to him, and tried to silence him. He himself held money in little account ; but he was unwilling that Marsy should pocket a million, for to allow him to have this million would be confessing his own powerlessness, acknowledging himself beaten, and setting an exorbitant value upon the influence of his rival, which would only tend to make it seem still more potent than his own.

“ Marsy is beginning to get a little tired of the struggle, don’t

you see?" Rougon said. "He's coming round. Wait a little longer, and we shall get the grant for nothing."

Then in almost threatening tones he added :

"I warn you that we shall quarrel if you accept. I cannot allow a friend of mine to be fleeced in such a way."

Then there was a pause in the conversation. The cab was passing up the Champs Elysées. The two men, wrapped in thought, looked as though they were carefully counting the trees in the lateral avenues. Monsieur Kahn was the first to break the silence.

"Listen to me now," he said in a low tone. "I ask nothing better than to keep with you, but you must acknowledge that for the last two years—"

He did not finish what he was going to say.

"Well, it isn't your fault," he continued ; "just now your hands are tied. But we had better give them the million ; believe me, we had."

"Never !" cried Rougon, energetically. "In a fortnight you shall have your grant ; in a fortnight, do you hear ?"

The cab now stopped in front of the little house in the Rue Marbeuf. The two men continued to talk for a moment or two longer, still sitting in the cab as though they were comfortably ensconced in their own room indoors. Monsieur Bouchard and Colonel Jobelin were coming to dine that evening with Rougon, and he pressed Monsieur Kahn to stay and meet them, but the latter was obliged, to his great regret, he said, to decline the invitation, as he was engaged elsewhere. The great man was now enthusiastically determined upon obtaining the grant. When at length he got out of the cab, he closed the door with a friendly air, and gave a parting nod to the ex-deputy.

"Till next Thursday, then !" cried the latter, thrusting his head out of the window as the cab drove off.

Rougon returned home feeling restless and slightly feverish. He could not even read the evening papers. Although it was scarcely five o'clock, he went into the drawing-room, and began to pace up and down, waiting for his guests to arrive. The first bright sun of the year, though it was only a pale January sun, had given him a touch of headache. His afternoon had left a very vivid impression upon him. All his friends seemed in some vague kind of way to be mixed up in it ; those to whom he submitted, those of whom he felt afraid, and those for whom he had a genuine affection. They all seemed to be goading

him, and driving him on to some immediate decisive step. He did not feel any displeasure at this; for their impatience did not appear unreasonable to him, and he realised that a sort of anger which was made up of the sum of his friends' individual angers was rising up within himself. He felt as though the ground in front of him was being gradually blocked up, and that the time was very near at hand when he would be compelled to make a formidable leap.

Then he suddenly thought of Gilquin, whom he had entirely forgotten. He rang for his servant to ask him if "the gentleman in the green over-coat" had called again during his absence. The servant said he had seen no one. Then Rougon told him that if Gilquin came during the evening he was to be shown into his study.

"And you will let me know immediately," he added. "Even if we are at table."

His feeling of curiosity was re-awakened, and he went to look for Gilquin's card. He read the inscription, "very important; a strange business," several times over, without being able to make anything further of it. When Monsieur Bouchard and the colonel arrived, he slipped the card into his pocket, feeling troubled and irritated by these words which kept buzzing in his brain.

The dinner was a very plain one. Monsieur Bouchard had been a bachelor for the last two days, his wife having had to go on a visit to a sick aunt, of whom she had never previously spoken, however. The colonel, for whom there was always a place laid at Rougon's table, brought his son, who was taking a holiday with him that evening. Madame Rougon did the honours of the table in her kindly silent fashion. The waiting was performed under her close observation, slowly, but most carefully, and without the slightest noise. The conversation turned upon the subjects of study in public schools. The chief clerk quoted some lines from Horace, and spoke of the prizes he had gained in the examinations, about 1813. The colonel would have liked to see a more military form of discipline maintained. He explained why Auguste had failed in his examination for his degree in November. The boy, he said, had such a lively intelligence that he always went beyond the questions asked by the examiners, and this annoyed them. While his father was thus explaining his failure, Auguste himself was eating the breast of a fowl, with a sly smile on his beaming dunce's face.

While they were at dessert, the sound of a bell in the entrance-hall caused Rougon the greatest emotion, and quite distracted his attention from his guests. He felt sure that it was Gilquin, and he raised his eyes sharply to the door, already mechanically folding up his napkin in the expectation of being summoned from the room. But when the door opened, it was Du Poizat who appeared. The ex-sub-prefect dropped into a chair a couple of yards away from the table, as though he were quite at home. He often came like this early in the evening, immediately after his dinner, which he took at a little boarding-house in the Faubourg Saint Honoré.

"I'm quite done up," he said, without giving any particulars of the complicated business which he had been transacting during the afternoon. "I should have gone straight off to bed, but I felt an inclination to come and glance over the papers. They are in your room, I suppose, Rougon, aren't they?"

He stayed where he was, however, and took a pear and half-a-glass of wine. The conversation then turned upon the dearness of provisions, all of which, it was said, had doubled in price during the last twenty years. Monsieur Bouchard said that he could remember having seen pigeons sold at fifteen sous the couple when he was quite young. When the liqueurs and coffee were handed round, Madame Rougon quietly disappeared, and the men went into the drawing-room without her. They were all quite at home with each other. The colonel and the chief-clerk themselves carried the card-table in front of the fire, and began to shuffle the cards, already absorbed in the consideration of profound combinations. Auguste was turning over some numbers of an illustrated journal at a side-table. Du Poizat had disappeared altogether.

"Just come and look at the hand I hold," exclaimed the colonel, abruptly. "Isn't it a strange one?"

Rougon went up to the table and nodded his head. Then he went and sat down again in silence. As he was taking up the tongs to move some of the logs of the fire, the servant came in very quietly, and said in his ear:

"The gentleman who came this morning is here."

Rougon started. He had not heard the bell. When he went into his study, he found Gilquin, with a rattan cane under his arm, standing up and examining, with a professional blinking of his eyes, a poor engraving of Napoleon at Saint

Helena. His coat was buttoned up to his chin, and his head was covered with an almost new black silk hat, tilted very much on one side.

"Well?" asked Rougon, sharply.

Gilquin, however, seemed in no hurry. He began to look at the engraving again, saying :

"It's very fine. How dreadfully bored he looks, doesn't he?"

The room was lighted by a single lamp, which stood on a corner of the writing-table. As Rougon entered, there was a slight noise, a gentle rustling of paper, behind the huge arm-chair which stood in front of the mantel-piece, then there was such a perfect silence that the previous sound might have been put down to the cracking of a half-extinguished piece of fire-wood. Gilquin declined to take a seat. The two men remained standing near the door, in a patch of shadow cast by a book-case.

"Well?" Rougon asked again.

He mentioned that he had called in the Rue Guisarde during the afternoon ; and then Gilquin began to speak of his door-keeper, an excellent woman, he said, who was dying of consumption, which she had contracted from the dampness of the ground floor of the house.

"But this important piece of business of yours? What is it?"

"Oh, wait a moment. I have come about that. I'll tell you about it directly. Did you go upstairs, and did you hear the cat? It's a cat that came in by the spout. One night, when my window was open, I found her lying by my side. She was licking my beard. It seemed very droll, and I kept her."

Then, at last, he began to speak of the particular business which had brought him there. It was a long story. He commenced by relating his amours with a laundress, with whom he had fallen in love one evening, as he was coming out of the Ambigu Theatre. Poor Eulalie, he said, had just been obliged to surrender all her furniture to her landlord, owing to the fact that she had been deserted by her lover when five instalments of her rent were due. For the last ten days, she had been lodging in a house in the Rue Montmartre, near her work, and it was in her room that he himself had been sleeping all the week, a room on the second floor, a dark little place at the far end of a passage, which looked on to a yard.

Rougon listened with resigned patience.

"Three days ago," continued Rougon, "I brought back with me a cake and a bottle of wine. We ate the cake and drank the wine in bed. We always go to bed in good time. A little before midnight, Eulalie got up to shake out the crumbs. Then she went soundly to sleep. She sleeps like a log. I, myself, was lying awake. I had blown out the candle, and I was staring up into the air when I heard the sounds of a dispute in the next room. I ought to tell you that between the two rooms there is a door of communication which has been fastened up. The voices grew quiet, and peace had apparently been made; but I heard such singular sounds that I got up and went and fixed my eye to a crack in the door. Well, you'll never guess what I saw!"

He stopped for a moment, and gazed with great round eyes at Rougon, revelling in the effect he thought he was producing.

"There were two people there: a young man of about five-and-twenty, fairly good-looking, and a middle-aged one, turned fifty, certainly, short and thin, and of a sickly appearance. They were engaged in examining a collection of pistols and daggers and swords and all kinds of new weapons of gleaming steel. They were talking together in a jargon which I did not recognise at first, but afterwards, by certain words that I heard, I knew it was Italian. I have travelled in Italy, you know, in the macaroni business. Then I strained my ear to listen, and then I understood, my dear fellow. There is a set of men who have come to Paris to assassinate the Emperor! There, what do you think of that?"

Then he crossed his arms and squeezed his cane tightly to his breast as he kept repeating:

"It's a funny business, isn't it?"

So this was Gilquin's strange affair! Rougon shrugged his shoulders. Twenty times before had various conspiracies been reported to him.

"You told me to come and tell you all the gossip of the neighbourhood," the *ex-commercial* traveller continued. "I want to render you all the service I can and I tell you all I hear. It is wrong of you to shake your head like that. Do you think if I had gone to the Prefecture that they would have sent me away without a nice little gratuity? But I prefer acting so as to benefit my friends. I tell you that the matter is

really serious. Go and tell it to the Emperor, and you will see how he will thank you."

For the last three days, Gilquin had been keeping a watch over these fine gentlemen, as he called them. During the day-time, two others made their appearance, a young man, and an elderly one, with a pale, handsome face and long black hair, who seemed to be the chief. They all seemed quite tired out when they came into the room, and they talked together in short, muttered phrases. Last night, Gilquin said, he had seen them filling some little iron machines which he believed were bombs. He had got Eulalie's key, and had taken off his boots and kept a careful watch in the room. In the evening, he had managed matters so that Eulalie began to snore about nine o'clock, which, he had thought, would have the effect of preventing their neighbours from feeling any suspicion; besides it was never prudent, he added, to let a woman have anything to do with political matters.

As Gilquin went on speaking, a grave expression came over Rougon's face. He was beginning to believe there was something in the matter. Beneath the vinous hilarity of the ex-commercial traveller and the odd details which were mingled with his narrative, he felt that there was a basis of truth which demanded his attention. Then his irksome feeling of expectation during the day and his anxious curiosity began to appear to him in the light of a presentiment, and he was again attacked by that inward trembling which he had felt every now and then since the morning; the sort of involuntary emotion experienced by a strong man when he feels that his fortune is staked upon a single card.

"A set of imbeciles who will have the police down on them at once," he said, with an affectation of utter indifference.

Gilquin began to grin.

"The police had better lose no time then," he rejoined.

Then he was silent, but he continued to smile and gently tap his hat. The great man saw that he had not told him everything. He looked at him searchingly. Then Gilquin opened the door to take his leave.

"Well, at anyrate, I have given you warning," he said. "I'm going to dine now, my friend. I've had no dinner yet; I've been playing the spy on my men all the afternoon, and I'm tremendously hungry now."

Rougon called him back and told him that he would have

some cold meat brought up for him ; and he immediately ordered a table to be prepared for him in the dining-room. Gilquin seemed quite touched by this attention. He shut the door of the study, and, lowering his voice so that the servant should not hear him, he said to Rougon :

“ You are a good fellow. Listen to me, now I don’t want to tell you any lies. If you had received me badly, I should have gone straight off to the prefecture. But, now, I will tell you everything, and trust to you not to forget the service I am rendering you. Friends are friends, whatever people may say.”

Then he stooped forward and continued in a whisper :

“ It is to come off to-morrow night. They are going to blow Badinguet up in front of the Opera when he arrives at the theatre. The carriage and the aides-de-camp and the whole lot will be clean swept away.”

Then, while Gilquin took himself off to his meal in the dining-room, Rougon remained sitting in the middle of his study, perfectly still and with an ashy face. He was deep in thought and seemed to be hesitating. At length he went and sat down at his desk and took up a sheet of paper, but he tossed it away again almost immediately. For a moment it seemed as if he were going to rush to the door and give an order. Then he slowly went back to his seat and became absorbed again in deep thought, which cast a shrouding gloom over his face.

Just at this moment, the great arm-chair in front of the fire-place suddenly moved, and Du Poizat stood up, calmly folding a newspaper.

“ What ! are you there ? ” cried Rougon, roughly.

“ Certainly ; I have been reading the papers,” replied the ex-sub-prefect, with a smile that exposed his irregular white teeth. “ You knew quite well I was there ; you saw me when you came in.”

This audacious falsehood cut all explanation short. The two men looked at each other for several moments in silence. Then as Rougon, blinking his eyelids and feeling confused and perplexed, again went up to his desk, Du Poizat made a little gesture, which plainly said : “ Wait a little ; there is no hurry. We must consider matters.” Not a word was exchanged between them, and they both went back into the drawing-room.

Such an angry dispute had broken out that evening between

the colonel and Monsieur Bouchard, on the subject of the Orleans Princes and the Count de Chambord, that they had banged their cards down, and sworn that they would never play with each other again. They had gone and seated themselves at the opposite sides of the fire-place with their eyes glistening with anger. When Rougon returned into the room, however, they were making friends again, and were loudly singing the great man's praises.

"Oh, I feel no constraint about it ; I say it before his face," the colonel continued. "There is no one else of his force at present."

"We are speaking ill of you, you hear," Monsieur Bouchard said, with a cunning smile.

Then the conversation was resumed.

"A most exceptional intelligence."

"A man of action, who has the look of victory in his eyes."

"Ah ! we want his help sadly just now."

"Yes, indeed. He could do something to get us out of the mess. He is the only man who can save the Empire."

Rougon stooped his big shoulders, and affected an air of modest displeasure. This open offering of incense was extremely pleasant to him. His vanity was never so delightfully titillated as when the colonel and Monsieur Bouchard bandied laudatory phrases like these backwards and forwards for a whole evening. They talked a great deal of obvious nonsense, and their faces wore gravely ridiculous expressions ; but Rougon enjoyed hearing their monotonous voices placidly singing his praises and lavishing quite inapplicable eulogies upon him. He sometimes made fun of them when they were not there, but, for all that, his pride and craving for power found great gratification in their freely uttered panegyrics. They formed, as it were, a vast dunghill of praises in which his huge body could wallow at its ease.

"No, no ; I am only a weak sort of man," he said, shaking his head. "If I were really all that you believe—"

He stopped short and did not finish his sentence. Then he went and sat down at the card table and began to consult the cards, an amusement that he rarely indulged himself in nowadays. Monsieur Bouchard and the colonel still continued to belaud him. They asserted that he was a great orator, a great administrator, a great financier, and a great statesman. Du Poizat, who had remained standing, nodded his head assent-

ingly. Presently he said, without looking at Rougon, and as though he had not been present :

“ It only wants the least thing to bring him into power. The Emperor is most favourably disposed towards Rougon. If some catastrophe were to happen to-morrow and the Emperor were to feel the need of an energetic hand, by the day after to-morrow Rougon would be minister.”

The great man slowly raised his eyes. Then he dropped back in his chair, leaving his combinations with the cards unfinished, while his face gloomily clouded over again. But the tireless voices of Monsieur Bouchard and the colonel seemed to softly lull him with their flatteries as he lay back buried in thought, and to spur him on to the adoption of some resolution about which he was hesitating. At length his face broke out into a smile, as young Auguste, who had just completed his abandoned arrangement of the cards, exclaimed :

“ It has come out all right, Monsieur Rougon.”

Just at this moment a servant came into the room and told Rougon that a gentleman and a lady were asking for him, and he handed him a card, at the sight of which Rougon uttered a slight cry.

“ What ! Are they in Paris ? ”

It was the Marquis and Marchioness d'Escorailles. Rougon at once hastened off to receive them in his study. They apologised for the lateness of their visit. Then, in the course of conversation, they let him know that they had been in Paris for a couple of days, but a fear lest a visit from them to a person so nearly associated with the government might be misconstrued had induced them to defer their call to the somewhat unseemly hour at which they had come. This explanation in no way offended Rougon. The presence of the marquis and marchioness in his house was an unhoped-for honour. If the Emperor himself had come and knocked at his door, it would not have given him so much gratification. These old people coming to him to ask a favour typified all Plassans offering him homage ; that aristocratic, haughty, repelling Plassans, which ever since youth had seemed to him like a sort of inaccessible Olympus. An old dream of ambition now seemed satisfied and realised, and he felt that he was avenged for the scornful way in which the little town had treated him when, as an advocate whom no one employed, he dragged his worn-down boots about its streets.

"We have not been able to find Jules," said the marchioness. "We were looking forward with pleasure to taking him by surprise. He has been obliged to go away to Orleans on business, it seems."

Rougon was not aware of the young man's absence ; but he quite understood it, when he called to mind the fact that the aunt whom Madame Bouchard had gone to see lived at Orleans. He justified Jules's absence, and said that it was a serious matter upon which he was engaged, a question of abuse of power, and that his journey was a matter of necessity. Then he told them that their son was a very intelligent young man and had a great future before him.

"It is very necessary for him to make his own way," said the marquis, lightly alluding to the ruin of the family. "It was a great trouble to us to part with him."

Then he and his wife began to discreetly deplore the necessities of a degenerate time which prevented a son from growing up in the faith of his parents. They themselves, they said, had never set foot in Paris since the fall of Charles X. till now ; and they would not have come now if it had not been a question of Jules's future. Since their dear boy, with their secret consent, had taken service under the Empire, they pretended to deny him before the world, but in secret they were continually striving for his advancement.

"We make no pretence with you, Monsieur Rougon," said the marquis, in tones of charming familiarity. "We love our boy ; it is natural we should. You have done a great deal already, and we thank you heartily for it. But we want you to do something more still. We are friends and fellow-townsmen, are we not ?"

Rougon bowed, feeling much moved. The humble demeanour of these two old people whom he had seen so majestic when they went on Sundays to the church of Saint Marc, made him feel as though he had received a sudden accession of importance. He gave them formal promises of his assistance.

As they were going away, after twenty minutes' friendly and familiar conversation, the marchioness took one of Rougon's hands and held it for a moment within her own.

"Then we may count upon you, dear Monsieur Rougon ?" she said. "We have come from Plassans especially for this purpose. We were beginning to feel a little impatient. At our age you can't wonder at it. Now, however, we shall go

back feeling very happy. People told us there that you had no longer any influence left."

Rougon smiled. Then, with an air of decision that seemed to be prompted by some secret thoughts of his own, he said :

"Let them say what they like, count upon me."

When they had left him, however, a shadow of regret passed over his face. He was still tarrying in the ante-chamber when he espied a neatly dressed man, who, balancing a little round, felt hat in his fingers, was standing in a respectful attitude in a corner of the room.

"What do you want?" Rougon asked, curtly.

The man, who was very tall, lowered his eyes and replied :

"Don't you recognise me, sir?"

Rougon bluntly declared that he did not.

"I'm Merle," then continued the visitor, "your old usher at the Council of State."

Rougon's manner now became somewhat softer :

"Oh, yes! But you are wearing a full beard now. Well, my man, what do you want me to do for you?"

Then Merle proceeded to explain. He had met Madame Correur that afternoon, and she had advised him to go and see Monsieur Rougon that very evening. If it had not been for that, Merle added, he would never have presumed to disturb him at such an hour.

"Madame Correur is extremely kind," he repeated several times.

Then he went on to say that he was out of place. The reason that he no longer shaved was that he had left the Council of State about six months previously. When Rougon proceeded to ask him the reason of his dismissal, he would not allow that he had been discharged for improper behaviour, but he bit his lips and said :

"They all knew there how devoted I was to you, sir. After you went away, I had to put up with all sorts of unpleasantness, because I have never been able to conceal my real feelings. One day I almost struck a fellow-servant who was saying provoking things, and then they discharged me."

Rougon looked at him searchingly.

"And so, my man, it's on my account that you are now out of place?"

Merle smiled slightly.

"And I owe you another berth, eh ? You want me to find you a situation somewhere—isn't that so ?"

"It would be very kind of you, sir."

There was a short pause. Rougon began to tap his hands gently against each other, with a fidgety mechanical motion. Then he began to smile, having made up his mind. He seemed to be under a good many obligations, and he would pay them all off.

"I will look after you," he said, "and get you a good place somewhere. You did right to come to me, my man."

Then he dismissed him. Now he no longer hesitated. He went straight into the dining-room where Gilquin was finishing off a pot of jam, after having eaten a great slice of pie and the leg of a fowl and some cold potatoes. Du Poizat, who had joined him, was sitting astride a chair talking to him. They were discussing women and the means of winning their love in somewhat bold language. Gilquin had kept his hat upon his head, and he leant back, lounged in his chair and began to pick his teeth, under the impression that he was behaving in proper aristocratic style.

"Well, I must be off now," he said, emptying his glass and smacking his lips. "I am going to the Rue Montmartre to see what has become of my birds."

But Rougon, who seemed in high spirits, began to joke at him. He asked him, now that he had dined, if he still believed in that story of a plot ? Du Poizat, too, began to affect a complete incredulity on the subject. He made an appointment for the next morning with Gilquin, to whom, he said, he owed a breakfast. Gilquin, with his cane under his arm, asked as soon as he could get a word in :

"Then you are not going to warn—"

"Yes, I am, of course," Rougon replied. "They'll do nothing but laugh at me, however. But there's no hurry. There will be plenty of time to-morrow."

The ex-commercial-traveller had already got his hand upon the handle of the door. He stepped back again, with a grin on his face.

"For all I care," he said, "they may blow Badinquet* to smithereens."

"Oh !" replied the great man, with an air of almost religious conviction, "the Emperor has no cause to fear, even if your

* The favourite Parisian nickname for Napoleon III.—*Trans.*

story is correct. These plots never succeed. There is a watchful Providence."

This was the last word said on the matter. Du Poizat went off with Gilquin, chatting familiarly with him. An hour later, at half-past ten, when Rougon shook hands with Monsieur Bouchard and the colonel as they took their leave, he stretched out his arms and yawned, as he not infrequently did, and said:

"I am quite tired out. I shall sleep well to-night."

On the following evening three bombs exploded beneath the Emperor's carriage in front of the opera-house. A wild panic seized upon the serried crowd blocking up the Rue Le Peletier. More than fifty people were struck. A woman in a blue silk dress was killed on the spot and stretched stark in the gutter. Two soldiers lay dying on the road. An aide-de-camp was dripping with blood from a wound in his neck. But, under the garish glare of the gas and in the midst of the smoke, the Emperor descended safe and unhurt from his riddled carriage and saluted his subjects. Only his hat was torn by a splinter from one of the bombs.

Rougon had spent the day quietly at home. In the morning, however, he had felt a little restless, and had twice been on the point of going out. Just as he was finishing his breakfast, Clorinde made her appearance ; and then, in her society in his study, where they remained till evening, he quite forgot all that was worrying him. She had come to consult him on a matter of great intricacy, and she appeared greatly discouraged. She could make nothing out of it, she said. Then Rougon began to console her, seeming much touched by her sadness. He gave her to understand that there was great reason for hope, and that circumstances were probably about to undergo a perfect change. He was by no means ignorant, he said, of the devotion of his friends, and of all that they had done for him, and he would make it his care to reward them, even the humblest of them. When Clorinde left him, he kissed her on the forehead. After he had dined, he felt an irresistible longing for a walk. He left the house and took the shortest way to the quays, feeling suffocated and longing for the fresh breezes of the river. It was a mild winter evening, and the low, cloudy sky was hanging over the city in silent blackness. In the distance the rumbling of the carriages along the streets could be faintly heard. Rougon walked along the deserted footways with a regular step, brushing the stone of the parapet

with his overcoat. The lights which spread out in the far distance, twinkling through the darkness like stars that marked the boundaries of some dead heaven, affected him with a sensation of the great magnitude and extent of all these squares and streets, the houses of which were now quite invisible ; and as he walked along, Paris seemed to have grown bigger, and to have stretched herself out more into harmony with his own huge form, and to be capable of giving him all the air he needed to inflate his great chest. The inky river, flecked here and there with shimmering gold, seemed to be breathing with a deep, easy respiration, like a sleeping giant. As Rougon came in front of the Palais de Justice, a clock struck the hour of nine. There was a tremulous throbbing in the air, and he turned round to listen. He fancied he could hear the sounds of a sudden panic spreading over the tops of the houses, and distant reports of explosions and cries of terror. Paris seemed to him to be suddenly horror-stricken by some great crime. Then he called to mind that afternoon in June, that bright, triumphant afternoon of the baptism, when the bells pealed out in the hot sunshine, and the quays were filled with a serried crowd, when everything told of the glory of the Empire at its apogee, that glory beneath which he had for a moment felt crushed and almost jealous of the Emperor. Now he seemed to be having his revenge. The sky was black and moonless ; the city was terror-stricken and dumb ; the quays were deserted and swept by a trembling shudder which seemed to scare the gas-lights, and there was a feeling of weird evil thrilling the darkness of the night. Rougon drew in long breaths of air, and felt that he loved this cut-throat Paris, in whose terror-striking gloom he was regaining supreme power.

Ten days later, he became Minister of the Interior, in the place of Monsieur de Marsy, who was appointed President of the Corps Législatif.

CHAPTER IX

ONE morning in March, Rougon was busily engaged at the Ministry of the Interior in drawing up a confidential circular which was to be received by the prefects on the following day. He kept stopping, and puffing, and dashing his pen across his paper.

“Jules, give me a synonym for authority,” he said. “It is very troublesome to express one’s self properly. I keep putting authority in every line.”

“Well, there’s power, government, empire,” the young man answered with a smile.

Monsieur Jules d’Escorailles, whom Rougon had appointed his secretary, was going through his correspondence at a corner of the writing-table. He opened the envelopes carefully with a pen-knife, glanced over the letters and then classified them. The colonel, Monsieur Kahn and Monsieur Béuin were sitting in front of the grate in which there was a large fire burning. They were all three lounging easily in their chairs, toasting their feet and appearing quite at home. Monsieur Kahn was reading a newspaper. The other two, as they placidly lay back in their chairs, were twiddling their thumbs and looking at the flames.

Rougon got up from his seat, poured out a glass of water at a side table and drank it off at a single draught.

“I don’t know what I can have eaten yesterday,” he said, “but I feel as though I could drink the Seine dry this morning.”

He did not resume his seat at once, but began to pace round the room, stretching his burly frame. His heavy step shook the floor underneath the thick carpet. He went and drew back the green velvet curtains to let in more light. Then he came back into the middle of the room, which was furnished with a gloomy and faded magnificence, and stood with his hands clasped behind his neck, revelling, as it were, in the official scent of the place, and glutting himself with the

odour of authority which he was inhaling there. He broke into an involuntary laugh, which grew louder and louder as he dwelt upon his triumph. The colonel and the other two men turned round upon hearing this out burst of gaiety, and questioned the great man with silent glances.

“Ah! it’s very nice, in spite of everything,” was all that he said.

As he sat down again at the huge rosewood writing-table, Merle came into the room. The usher was irreproachably dressed in black, and wore a white tie. There was no longer a single hair upon his solemn face. He was quite clean-shaved.

“I beg your excellency’s pardon,” he said, “but the prefect of the Somme—”

“Tell him to go to the deuce! I’m busy,” Rougon answered roughly. “It’s quite preposterous that I am never to be allowed to have a moment to myself.”

Merle seemed in no way disconcerted.

“The prefect,” he continued, “says that your excellency is expecting him. There are also the prefects of Nièvre, the Cher, and the Jura.”

“Well, let them wait! That’s what they’re made for,” rejoined Rougon loudly.

The usher left the room. Monsieur d’Escorailles had broken out into a smile. The three other men who were warming themselves at the fire lolled back more easily in their chairs, and seemed amused by the minister’s reply.

“It is true,” said the latter, “that I have been going through the prefects for the last month. It is necessary that I should have them all here. A nice lot they are, too; some terrible stupids amongst them. However, they are very obedient. But I feel that I have had enough of them. And, besides, it’s on their account that I’m working this morning.”

Then he applied himself to his circular again. The silence of the room was only broken by the scratching of his quill-pen, and the slight rustling of the envelopes which Monsieur d’Escorailles was opening. Monsieur Kahn had taken up another newspaper, and the colonel and Monsieur Béjuin were half asleep.

Outside, France was hushed in fear. The Emperor, in summoning Rougon to power, had been desirous of making examples. He knew the great man’s iron hand. He had said to him on the morning after his attempted assassination, with

the anger of a man who has just escaped being murdered, "No moderation, mind ! They must be made to fear you." He had just armed him, too, with that terrible law, passed for the general safety, which authorised the confinement in Algeria or expulsion from the empire of anyone who was convicted of a political offence. Although no Frenchman had been concerned in the crime of the Rue Le Peletier, the republicans were about to be hunted down and transported, and there was to be a general sweeping away of the ten thousand "suspects" who had been passed over on the second of December. There were rumours of contemplated action by the revolutionary party. The authorities, it was said, had made a seizure of arms and treasonable documents. Since the middle of March, three hundred and eighty persons had been embarked at Toulon for Algeria, and every week a fresh contingent was sent off. The whole land trembled in the terror which rolled out like a black storm-cloud from the room with the green velvet curtains, where Rougon was laughing at his own thoughts, and stretching his arms.

The great man had never before felt so completely contented and satisfied. He felt well and strong, and was increasing in flesh. His health had quite come back to him with his restoration to power. When he walked about the room, he brought his feet down heavily upon the carpet, as though he wanted the sound of his tread to reverberate throughout the furthest corners of France. He would have liked it if on putting his empty glass upon the side-table or casting aside his pen he had awakened an answering echo through all the country. It delighted him to be a source of fear, to forge thunderbolts in the midst of the smiling gratification of his friends, and to crush down a people with his swollen parvenu fists. In one of his circulars, he had written : "The well-disposed may feel all confidence ; it is the evil-disposed alone, who need tremble." He revelled in playing this part of a god, damning some, and saving others. He was filled with a mighty pride ; his idolatry of his own strength and intelligence was becoming a real religion with him.

Amongst the new men who had sprung up during the second Empire, Rougon had long been known as professing strong views as to government. His name was almost a synonym for the sternest repression, the refusal of all liberties ; despotic rule, in fact. Everyone consequently knew what they had to

expect when they saw him called to office. To his intimate friends, however, Rougon unbosomed himself. He did not so much hold opinions, he said, as feel an absolute need and necessity of holding power. Power had too much attraction for him, and was too essential to his inner cravings for him to refuse it under any conditions upon which it might be offered to him. To rule, to put his foot on the neck of the crowd, was his first and immediate ambition; all the rest was merely a secondary matter to which he could easily accommodate himself. All he really wanted was to be chief. It so happened, however, he said, that the circumstances under which he was returning to power made his success still more pleasing to him than it might otherwise have been. The Emperor had allowed him complete liberty of action, and he was at last going to be in a position to realise his old dream of driving the crowd with his whip like a herd of cattle. Nothing filled him with greater satisfaction than to know that he was feared and disliked. Sometimes when his friends told him that he was a tyrant, he smiled, and said with a deep meaning :

“ If I should become a liberal some day, people will say that I have changed.”

Rougon’s greatest joy, however, was to stand triumphant in the midst of his circle of friends. He forgot France and the obsequious functionaries and the crowd of petitioners who besieged his doors in the continual admiration of his ten or twelve intimate associates. His office was open to them at any hour, he allowed them to be quite at home there, and to take possession of his chairs, and even of his desk itself; and he told them that it was a pleasure to have them always about him like a pack of faithful dogs. It was not he alone in his sole person who made up the minister, but the whole coterie, who were appanages of himself. The bonds between them seemed to be drawn closer in this season of success, and Rougon began to love his band of associates with a jealous love, and made a point of keeping them all in constant communion with him, feeling, as it were, that he himself was rendered greater and more powerful by their united ambitions. He forgot all his secret contempt for them, and began to consider them very intelligent and able, and made after his own image. He was anxiously desirous that he himself should be respected in their persons, and he defended them as energetically as he would have defended the fingers of his hands. He made their quarrels his

own. He even became filled with the belief that he was greatly indebted to them, and he thought smilingly of their endeavours for his success. Wanting nothing for himself, he lavished upon them all the sweet fruits of office, and he indulged himself to the full in the pleasure he derived by showering upon them the gifts that his prosperity placed at his disposal.

The silence of the great warm room remained unbroken for some time. Then Monsieur d'Escorailles, after having glanced at the address of one of the letters before him, handed it to Rougon without opening it.

“There is a letter from my father, here,” he said.

The marquis with an excessive humility thanked the minister for having appointed Jules to the position of his secretary. There were two pages of fine writing which Rougon read carefully through. Then he folded the letter and put it into his pocket. Before recommencing his work, he asked :

“Hasn't Du Poizat written ?”

“Yes, sir,” answered the secretary, picking out a letter from the pile in front of him. “He is beginning to find his way about in his prefecture. He says that Deux-Sèvres and the town of Niort in particular want guiding with a firm hand.”

Rougon glanced over the letter.

“Certainly,” he said, when he had finished reading it, “he shall have all the authority he requires. There is no occasion to send him any reply. My circular will be sufficient.”

Then he took up his pen again, and began to cudgel his brains for suitable concluding sentences. Du Poizat had been desirous of becoming prefect at Niort, in his own neighbourhood, and the minister thought especially of Deux-Sèvres when any question required his grave consideration, and he governed France generally in accordance with the opinions and necessities of his old comrade in poverty. Just as he was at last finishing his confidential circular to the prefects, something suddenly seemed to irritate Monsieur Kahn.

“It is abominable !” he exclaimed.

Then, rapping his hands upon the newspaper he was reading, he turned to Rougon, and cried :

“Have you read this ? There is a leading article here appealing to the basest passions. Just listen to this. ‘The hand that punishes should be impeccable, for, if justice is tampered with, the social bond becomes injuriously relaxed.’ And, here again, in the miscellaneous paragraphs, there is the story of a

countess eloping with the son of a corn-factor. They ought not to be allowed to publish such things. It tends to destroy the people's respect for the upper classes."

"The serial story is still more odious," interposed Monsieur d'Escorailles. "It is about a wife, who has been well brought up, and who betrays her husband. The author does not even make her feel any remorse."

A gesture of anger escaped Rougon.

"Yes," he said, "my attention has already been called to that number. You will see that I have marked certain passages with a red pencil. And it is one of our own papers, too! Every day I am obliged to go over it line by line. Ah! the best of them are bad, and we shall have to cut the throats of the whole lot of them."

Then, compressing his lips, he added in a lower tone:

"I have sent for the editor, and I am expecting him here directly."

The colonel had taken the paper from Monsieur Kahn. He broke out into expressions of indignation, and then handed it on to Monsieur Béjuin, who, in his turn, showed himself quite disgusted. Rougon, in the meanwhile, was leaning his elbows on his desk and half closing his eyes.

"By the way," he said, turning to his secretary, "that poor Huguenin died yesterday. That leaves an inspectorship vacant. We shall have to appoint somebody to it."

Then, as the three friends sitting before the fire briskly raised their heads, he continued:

"Oh, it's a post of no importance. Six thousand francs a year. It's true that there's absolutely nothing to do."

Here he was interrupted by a person opening the door of an adjoining room.

"Oh, come in, Monsieur Bouchard, come in!" he cried, "I was just going to call for you."

Bouchard, who had been appointed head of department within the last week, was bringing a memorandum about the mayors and prefects who had asked for the crosses of chevalier and officer in the Legion of Honour. Rougon had twenty-five crosses to dispose of amongst the most meritorious of the applicants. He took the memorandum, read over the list of names and consulted various papers. While he was thus engaged, Monsieur Bouchard went up to the fire and shook hands with the three friends. Then he leant his back against the mantel-

piece and lifted up the tails of his coat in order to warm his legs.

"A miserably wet day," he said. "We shall have a late spring."

"It's an awful day," replied the colonel, "I feel one of my attacks coming on. I have had shooting pains in my left foot all the night."

"And how is your wife?" asked Monsieur Kahn after a short pause.

"Thank you, she is very well," replied Monsieur Bouchard. "I am expecting to see her here this morning."

Then there was another pause. Rougon was still examining the papers. As he came to a certain name, he stopped.

"Isidore Gaudibert— That isn't the man who writes verses, is it?"

"Yes, that is the man," Monsieur Bouchard answered. "He has been Mayor of Barbeville since 1852. On every happy event, the Emperor's marriage, the Empress' confinement, and the Prince Imperial's baptism, he has sent charming verses to their Majesties."

A look of disdain passed over the minister's face. The colonel, however, asserted that he had read the odes and thought them very fine. He referred to one in particular, in which the Emperor was compared to a fire-work. Then the friends all began to eulogise the Emperor in the most flattering language, doing so with a feeling of genuine personal satisfaction. They were all enthusiastic Bonapartists now. The two cousins, the colonel and Monsieur Bouchard, were completely reconciled, and no longer threw the Orleans Princes and the Count de Chambord at each other's heads, but rivalled one another as to which should excel in singing their Sovereign's praises.

"Oh, no! not this one!" Rougon suddenly exclaimed. "This Jusselin is a creature of Marsy's. There is no call upon me to reward the friends of my predecessor."

Then with a stroke of his pen, that cut through the paper, he crossed the name out.

"But we must find some one," he resumed. "It is an officer's cross."

The friends sat perfectly still. Monsieur d'Escorailles, notwithstanding his extreme youth, had received the chevalier's cross a week previously. Monsieur Kahn and Monsieur Bouchard were officers, and the colonel had just been named commander.

"Well, let us see ; an officer's cross," said Rougon, beginning to refer to his papers again.

Then he stopped short as if he were struck by a sudden idea.

"Aren't you mayor of some place or other, Monsieur Béjuin ?" he asked.

Monsieur Béjuin merely nodded his head twice, and Monsieur Kahn answered more fully for him.

"Yes," said the latter ; "he is Mayor of Saint Florent, the little commune where his cut-glass works are."

"Well, then, that's settled !" said the minister, quite delighted to have an opportunity of advancing one of his friends. "You never ask for anything for yourself, Monsieur Béjuin, so I must look after you."

Monsieur Béjuin smiled and expressed his thanks. It was quite true that he never asked for anything, but he was always there, silent and modest, and on the look-out for any crumbs that might fall, and ready to pick them up.

"Léon Béjuin—isn't it?—in the place of Pierre François Jusselin," continued Rougon, as he made the alteration of the names.

"Béjuin, Jusselin ; that makes a rhyme," observed the colonel.

This remark struck the company as being very witty, and caused a deal of laughter. Then Monsieur Bouchard took away the signed documents. Rougon got up from his seat. His legs were paining him a little, he said. The wet weather affected him.

The morning was now wearing on ; there was a buzzing hum of life to be heard from the various offices ; quick steps sounded in the neighbouring rooms ; doors were being opened and closed, and there was a general whispering sound which was stifled by the velvet hangings. Several clerks came into the room to obtain the minister's signature to various documents. There was a continual coming and going, and the administrative machine was in full work, at the cost of an enormous expenditure of documents which were carried about from office to office. In the midst of all this hurrying to and fro, some twenty or more people were wearily waiting with resigned patience in the ante-room till his excellency should be graciously pleased to receive them. Rougon, in the meanwhile, was busying himself amongst the crowd of subordinates with an appearance of quite feverish activity and energy ; giving his orders here in low tones, storming at some official there, arranging

matters and settling questions with a word, while he towered up huge and domineering, his neck swollen, and his whole face expressive of strength and determination.

Merle now came into the room again with that quiet composure which no amount of rebuffs could ruffle.

“The prefect of the Somme—” he began.

“Again!” interrupted Rougon violently.

The usher bowed and then began again :

“The prefect of the Somme has begged me to ask your excellency if you can receive him this morning. If your excellency cannot, then he would be much obliged to your excellency if you would kindly fix a time for to-morrow.”

“I will see him this morning. Confound it all, let him have a little patience !”

Merle had left the door open, and the ante-room could be seen. It was a large apartment, with a great table in the centre and a line of arm-chairs, covered with red velvet, along the walls. All the chairs were occupied, and there were even two ladies standing by the table. Every head was turned towards the minister’s room, and every face bore a wistful, supplicating expression, and seemed to seek permission to enter. Near the door, the prefect of the Somme, a pale little man, was talking to his two colleagues from the Jura and the Cher. He was just on the point of rising, in the expectation that he was at last going to be received in audience, when Rougon again spoke.

“In ten minutes,” he said to Merle. “Just at present I cannot see any one.”

Just as he was speaking, however, he caught sight of Monsieur Beulin-d’Orchère crossing the floor of the ante-room. He darted briskly forward to meet him, and drew him by the hand into his room.

“Come in, my friend, come in !” he exclaimed. “You have just come, haven’t you ? You haven’t been waiting ? Well, what news have you brought ?”

The door was closed, and the occupants of the ante-room were left in silence again. Rougon and Monsieur Beulin-d’Orchère talked together in low tones near one of the windows. The judge, who had just been appointed first president of the Court of Paris, was ambitious of holding the Seals ; but when the Emperor had been sounded upon the matter, he had shown himself quite impenetrable.

“Capital !” said the minister, raising his voice. “Your

news is very good. I will take active steps ; I promise you that."

He was just letting the judge out through his private rooms, when Merle appeared again.

"Monsieur La Rouquette," he announced.

"No, no ! I am busy, and he bores me," said Rougon, signing energetically to the usher to close the door.

Monsieur La Rouquette heard quite distinctly what was said ; but this did not prevent him from entering the minister's room with a smiling face.

"How is your excellency ?" he said, stretching out his hand. "It's my sister who has sent me. You seemed a little tired at the Tuileries yesterday. You know that they are going to act a proverb in the Empress's apartments next Monday. My sister is taking a part in it. Combelot has designed the dresses. You will come, won't you ?"

He stood there for a whole quarter of an hour prattling away in a wheedling fashion, addressing Rougon sometimes as "your excellency," and sometimes as "dear master." He dragged in a few stories of the minor theatres, praised a ballet girl, and begged that a word might be said to the director of the tobacco manufactory so that he might get some good cigars. Then he concluded by playfully assailing Monsieur de Marsy in the strongest language.

"Well, he's not such a bad fellow, after all," said Rougon, when the young deputy had taken himself off. "I'll just go and dip my face in the basin. I think my cheeks are quite burning."

He disappeared for a moment behind a curtain, and then a great splashing of water and a deal of snorting and blowing was heard. Monsieur d'Escorailles had now finished classifying his letters, and taking a little file with a tortoise-shell handle from his pocket, he began to delicately trim his nails. Monsieur Béjuin and the Colonel were gazing up at the ceiling. They were so buried in their easy-chairs that they looked as though they would never be able to get out of them again. Monsieur Kahn turned to a heap of newspapers which were lying on a table by his side. He just turned them over, glanced at their titles, and then threw them aside. Then he got up.

"Are you going ?" asked Rougon, who now appeared again, wiping his face with a towel.

"Yes," replied Monsieur Kahn, "I've read the papers, and I am off."

Rougon, however, asked him to wait a moment. Then he took him aside and told him that he hoped to get down to Deux-Sèvres the following week, to be present at the commencement of the operations for the new line from Niort to Angers. He had several reasons, he said, for wishing to go down into that neighbourhood. Monsieur Kahn manifested great delight. He had succeeded in getting the grant early in March. He was now busily engaged in floating the scheme, and he was conscious of the additional importance which the minister's presence would lend to the initial ceremony, the details of which he was already carefully arranging.

"Then I may reckon upon you to fire the first mine?" he said, as he took his leave.

Rougon now sat down at his desk again, and began to consult a list of names. The crowd in the ante-room was now growing more and more impatient.

"I've barely got a quarter of an hour," he said. "Well I'll see as many of them as I can."

Then he rang his bell, and, when Merle appeared, he said to him:

"Show in the perfect of the Somme."

Then he added immediately, still keeping his eyes upon the list of names :

"Wait a moment. Are Monsieur and Madame Charbonnel there? Show them in."

The usher's voice could be heard calling out, "Monsieur and Madame Charbonnel." Then the couple from Plassans entered the room, followed by the astonished eyes of the other occupants of the ante-chamber. Monsieur Charbonnel was wearing a dress-coat with square tails and a velvet collar, and Madame Charbonnel was dressed in puce silk, with a bonnet trimmed with yellow ribbons. They had been patiently waiting for two hours.

"You ought to have sent your card in to me," said Rougon. "Merle knows you."

Then, interrupting their stammering greeting, in which the words "your excellency" were constantly recurring, he cried out gaily:

"Victory! The Council of State has given judgment. We have beaten the terrible bishop!"

The old lady's emotion upon hearing this was so great that she was obliged to sit down. Her husband supported himself against the back of an arm-chair.

"I learned this good news yesterday evening," the minister continued. "As I was anxious to tell it to you, myself, I asked you to come here. It's a pretty little windfall, five hundred thousand francs, eh ?"

He began to joke them, and felt quite happy at seeing their faces so much moved with emotion. It was some time before Madame Charbonnel, in a choking timorous voice, could say :

"Is it really all over, then ? Really ? Can't they have any more trials ?"

"No, no ; be quite easy about it. The fortune is yours."

Then he gave them certain particulars about the matter. The Council of State had refused to allow the Sisters of the Holy Family to take possession of the bequest upon the ground that natural heirs were in existence, and it had annulled the will as being wanting in the necessary appearances of genuineness. Monseigneur Rochart, Rougon said, was in a terrible rage, and the great man, who had met the bishop the previous evening at the house of the Minister of Public Instruction, still laughed at the recollection of his angry looks. He seemed quite delighted at his triumph over the prelate.

"He hasn't been able to gobble me up, you see," he said ; "I am too big a mouthful for him. I don't think, though, that it's all over as yet between us. I could see that by the look of his eyes. He is a man who never forgets anything, I should imagine. However, I daresay I shall be able to hold my own."

The Charbonnels were profuse in their expressions of gratitude and respect. They should leave Paris that same evening, they said. They appeared, however, to be a prey to great anxiety. Their cousin Chevassu's house, at Faverolles, had been left in the charge of a pious old woman who was extremely devoted to the Sisters of the Holy Family, and the Charbonnels seemed to think that upon learning the issue of the trial she might strip the house of its contents and go off with them. The Sisters, they said, were capable of anything.

"Yes, get off this evening," the minister advised. "If anything happens to bother you down there, just write and let me know about it."

When he opened the door to see them out, he noticed the look of astonishment on the faces of the occupants of the ante-

chamber. The prefect of the Somme was exchanging a smile with his colleagues of the Jura and the Cher, and there was an expression of scorn on the lips of the two ladies who were standing by the table.

“ You will write to me, won’t you ? ” Rougon now said, raising his voice. “ You know how devoted I am to you. When you get to Plassans, tell my mother that I am quite well.”

He crossed through the ante-chamber with them and accompanied them to the outer door to magnify them before all the crowd of waiting people, feeling not the least whit ashamed of the old couple, but proud, rather, of having come from their little town and of now being able to raise them as high as he liked. The favour-seekers and the functionaries bowed as he passed in front of them and also did reverence to the puce silk dress and square-tailed coat of the Charbonnels.

When Rougon returned to his own room, he found the colonel standing up.

“ Good-bye till this evening,” said the latter. “ It’s beginning to get a little too warm here.”

Then he bent forward to whisper a few words into the minister’s ear. They concerned his son Auguste, whom he was about to remove from college as he quite despaired of his ever passing his examination. Rougon had promised to take him into his office, although the regulations made it necessary that all the clerks should have taken a bachelor’s degree.

“ Very well, bring him here,” Rougon said. “ I will have the regulation waived ; I will manage it somehow. And he shall have a salary at once, as you are anxious about it.”

Monsieur Béjuin now remained alone in front of the fire. He wheeled his chair into the centre of the room and seemed quite unaware that it was growing empty. He always remained till the last and waited till every one else had gone in the hope of being offered something which had been hitherto forgotten.

Merle now received orders to introduce the prefect of the Somme. However, instead of going towards the door, he stepped up to the writing-table.

“ If your excellency will kindly permit me,” he said with a pleasant smile, “ I will at once acquit myself of a small commission.”

Rougon leant his elbows upon his blotting-pad and listened.

“ It is about poor Madame Correur. I went to see her this morning. She was in bed. She has got a nasty boil in a very

awkward place ; such a big one it is too ; more than half the size of her fist. There is nothing dangerous about it, but it gives her a great deal of pain, as she has a very tender skin."

"Well?" said the minister.

"I helped the servant to turn her round. The poor lady seemed very anxious and she wanted very much to come and see your excellency and get the answers you had promised to give her. Just as I was coming away, she called me back and told me that it would be very kind of me if I would bring her the answers when I went off after my day's work. Would your excellency be so good as to let me do so?"

The minister turned round with a smiling expression.

"Monsieur d'Escorailles," he said, "give me those papers there in that cupboard."

It was a bundle of Madame Correur's papers to which he referred. They were tightly packed in a grey bag. There were letters, and projects, and petitions, in all kinds of writing and spelling ; requests for tobacco-agencies, for licenses to sell stamps, for assistance, and for grants and pensions. Each loose sheet bore a marginal note of five or six lines, written by Madame Correur, followed by a big masculine-looking signature.

Rougon turned over the papers and glanced at the little footnotes which he himself had written with a red pencil.

"Madame Jalaguier's pension is raised to eighteen hundred francs," he said. "A tobacco-agency is granted to Madame Leturc. Madame Chardon's articles are accepted. Nothing has yet been done for Madame Testanière. Ah ! you can say, too, that I have been successful in the matter of Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq. I have mentioned her case, and I have found some ladies who will provide the dowry necessary for her marriage with the officer who seduced her."

"I thank your excellency a thousand times," said Merle, with a low bow.

As he was going out, a charming blonde head, wearing a rose-coloured bonnet, looked in at the door.

"Can I come in?" said a fluty voice.

Then, without waiting for a reply, Madame Bouchard entered the room. She had not seen the usher in the ante-chamber, and so she had come straight on. Rougon, who addressed her as "my dear child," made her sit down, after detaining her little gloved hands within his own for a moment.

"Have you come about anything important?" he asked.

"Yes, very important," Madame Bouchard replied with a smile.

Then Rougon told Merle not to show anyone in. Monsieur d'Escorailles, who had just finished trimming his nails, had advanced to greet Madame Bouchard. She signed to him to stoop down, and then began to speak to him in quick low tones. The young man nodded his head assentingly. Then he went and took up his hat, saying to Rougon :

"I'm going to breakfast. There doesn't seem to be anything of importance. There's only this matter of the inspectorship. We shall have to give it to someone."

The minister looked perplexed and shook his head.

"Yes, certainly," he said, "we shall have to appoint somebody. A whole heap of men have already been suggested to me ; but I don't care to appoint people that I don't know."

Then he glanced round the room as though he were trying to find somebody. His eye fell upon Monsieur Béjuin, who was silently lounging in his chair before the fire with an expression of complete unconcern upon his face.

"Monsieur Béjuin," said Rougon.

Monsieur Béjuin quietly opened his eyes, but still sat quite still.

"Would you like to be an inspector? I may tell you that it's a post worth six thousand francs a year. There is nothing to do, and the place is quite compatible with your functions of deputy."

Monsieur Béjuin nodded his head gently. Yes, yes, he would accept the post. When the matter was settled, he still remained sitting before the fire for another couple of minutes. Then it probably struck him that there was no likelihood of his picking up any more crumbs that morning, for he took himself slowly off after Monsieur d'Escorailles.

"There! we are alone now! Now, my dear child, what's the matter?" Rougon said to pretty Madame Bouchard.

He wheeled up an easy-chair and sat down in front of her in the middle of the room. Then he began to look at her dress. She was wearing a gown of pale rose cashmere. It was of very soft material and hung round her in close clinging folds. She was dressed without being clothed. The soft stuff clearly showed the form of her arms and bosom, and her clinging skirt plainly revealed the roundness of her legs. There was a suggestion of nudity about her which was heightened

by the way in which she had contrived to raise her waist so as to leave her hips quite free and conspicuous. Not a scrap of petticoat was to be seen. She looked, indeed, as though she were quite without under-clothing ; but, for all that, there was something very bewitching about her appearance.

“ Well, what’s the matter ? ” Rougon repeated.

Madame Bouchard smiled without making any immediate answer. She lay back in her chair, showing the little curls that clustered underneath her rose-coloured bonnet and half-opening her lips and letting her white teeth set seen. There was an expression of coaxing unrestraint about her little face, an air of mingled supplication and submission.

“ It is something I want to ask of you,” she murmured at length.

Then she added with animation :

“ Promise me that you’ll do it.”

But Rougon would promise nothing. He wanted to know what it was first. He mistrusted ladies. Then, as she bent forward to him, he said to her :

“ Is it something very great, that you daren’t tell me ? Well, I must get it out of you by questions. Let us set about it methodically. Is it something for your husband ? ”

Madame Bouchard shook her head, still continuing to smile.

“ No ! Is it for Monsieur d’Escorailles, then ? You were plotting something together over there in whispers a little while ago.”

Madame Bouchard again shook her head. She pulled a pretty little face which clearly expressed that it had been quite necessary to get rid of Monsieur d’Escorailles. Then, as Rougon was wondering what it could be that she wanted, she pulled her chair still nearer to him till her legs touched his.

“ You won’t scold me, will you ? ” she said. “ You do love me a little, don’t you ? Well, it’s for a young man. You don’t know him, but I will tell you his name directly, when you have promised to give him the place. Oh, it’s quite an insignificant place I want for him. You will only have to say a word and we shall be very, very grateful to you.”

“ Is he a relation of yours ? ” Rougon now asked.

Madame Bouchard sighed deeply, looked at him with languishing eyes, and let her hands slip down so that Rougon might take them in his own.

"No, a friend," she said, in very low tones. "Oh ! I am very unhappy !"

She abandoned and surrendered herself to him by this confession. It was a thrillingly voluptuous attack, made with cunning artfulness, and skilfully calculated to do away with all his slightest scruples. For a moment Rougon even thought that she had invented the whole story as an extra seductive refinement, in order to make herself still more desirable as being taken from the arms of another.

"But this is very shocking !" he exclaimed.

Then, with a quick familiar gesture, the young woman laid her ungloved hand upon his mouth. She leant her body forward against his, and she closed her eyes in a thrill of voluptuous languor. Her soft skirt, which covered her scarcely more than a long thin night-dress would have done, lay over one of Rougon's knees, and her close clinging corsage rose and fell with the heaving of her bosom. For some moments Rougon felt as though she were lying naked in his arms. Then he took her roughly by the waist and swung her into the middle of the room.

"Good heavens !" he cried, "do behave yourself decently !"

The young woman remained standing before him with pale lips and downcast eyes.

"Yes, it is disgraceful ! it is abominable !" Rougon continued. "Monsieur Bouchard is an excellent man. He adores you. He trusts you with blind confidence. No, no, indeed ! I will certainly not help you to deceive him. I refuse, refuse absolutely, do you hear ? I'm telling you just what I think, and I'm not mincing words, my pretty young woman. One doesn't want to be too hard upon you, and one could have pardoned, for instance—"

He checked himself. He was going to have allowed that he could tolerate Monsieur d'Escorailles. But gradually he grew calmer, and assumed an air of great dignity. Seeing that Madame Bouchard was trembling, he made her sit down, while he himself remained standing, lecturing her severely. It was a real sermon that he preached to her, and he chose his words well. He told her that she was offending against all laws, both human and divine ; that she was treading upon the edge of a precipice, that she was dishonouring the domestic fireside, and preparing for herself an old age full of remorse. Then, fancying that he could detect a slight smile at the corners of

the young woman's lips, he proceeded to draw a picture of this old age, in which her beauty would be in ruins, her heart forever empty, and her brow flushed with shame beneath her white hair. Then he discussed her sins from a social point of view. Here he showed himself especially severe. For even, he said, if she tried to excuse herself upon the plea of her passionate temperament, still the evil example she was setting was quite unpardonable. From this he went on to rail at modern licentiousness and the disgraceful dissoluteness of the times. Then he spoke of himself. He was the guardian of the laws, he said, and he could never abuse his power by lending himself to the encouragement of vice. Without virtue it seemed to him that a government was impossible. Finally he concluded by defying his enemies to name a single act of nepotism in his administration, a single favour granted by him that was due to intrigue.

Pretty Madame Bouchard listened to him with downcast head, huddling herself up in her chair and letting her delicate neck show out beneath the ribbons of her rose-coloured bonnet. As Rougon finished speaking, she got up and made her way to the door, without saying a word. But as she laid her fingers upon the handle, she raised her head and began to smile again.

"He is called Georges Duchesne," she murmured. "He is principal clerk in my husband's division and wants to be assistant—"

"No, no!" Rougon cried.

Then the young woman left the room, casting the long contemptuous glance of a scorned woman at the minister. She went away slowly, dragging the train of her dress languidly after her, desirous of leaving in Rougon's mind a feeling of regret that he had let her go unenjoyed.

The minister returned into his room with an expression of weariness. He had beckoned to Merle to follow him. The door remained half-open.

"The editor of the *Vœu National*, whom your excellency sent for, has just come," said the usher in a low tone.

"Oh, very well," replied Rougon; "but I'll see those gentlemen who have been waiting so long first."

Just at this moment a valet appeared at the door which led to the minister's private apartments. He announced that breakfast was ready and that Madame Delestang was waiting for his excellency in the drawing-room.

"Tell them to serve breakfast at once," replied the minister, briskly. "I will see the gentlemen afterwards. I'm quite dying with hunger."

Then he just popped his head through the doorway and gave a glance round. The ante-room was still quite full. Not a functionary nor a petitioner had moved. The three prefects were still talking together in their corner. The two ladies by the table were leaning upon their finger-tips, and looked a little weary. The same people were to be seen motionless and silent in the red velvet chairs along the walls. Then Rougon left his room, giving Merle orders to detain the prefect of the Somme and the editor of the *Vœu National*.

Madame Rougon, who was not very well, had left on the previous evening for the south, where she was going to stay for a month. She had an uncle living in the neighbourhood of Pau. Delestang had been in Italy for the last six weeks, where he had been sent upon an important mission connected with agriculture. And thus it came about that the minister had invited Clorinde, who wanted to have a long talk with him, to come to breakfast at his official residence.

While the young woman waited patiently for the minister's arrival, she turned over the pages of a law-treatise which was lying upon a table.

"You must be getting dreadfully hungry," he said to her gaily as he came into the drawing-room. "I've had a tremendous lot to do this morning."

Then he gave her his arm and conducted her into the dining-room, an immense apartment where the little table near a window, laid for two, seemed quite lost. A couple of tall footmen waited upon them. Rougon and Clorinde, who both preserved a very serious demeanour, ate rapidly. Their meal consisted of some radishes, a slice of cold salmon, cutlets with potatoes and a little cheese. They took no wine; Rougon drank nothing but water of a morning and they scarcely exchanged half a score words. Then, when the two footmen had cleared the table and brought in the coffee and liqueurs, Clorinde looked at Rougon and gave a slight twitch of her eyebrows which he perfectly understood.

"That will do; you can go now," he said to the footmen. "I will ring if I want anything."

The servants left the room. Then Clorinde got up from her chair and tapped her skirt to remove the crumbs which had

fallen upon it. She was wearing a black silk dress, considerably too large for her and trimmed with such a complication of flounces that she seemed a mere bundle, indeed it was difficult to say where her hips or her bosom were.

“What a tremendous place this is!” she said, going to the end of the room. “It would do splendidly for a wedding or a funeral feast, this dining-room of yours.”

Then she came back and said :

“I should very much like to have a cigarette, do you know?”

“Very well,” replied Rougon ; “there’s some tobacco there. I never smoke myself.”

Clorinde winked her eyes and took out of her pocket a little red silk tobacco pouch embroidered with gold, scarcely larger than a purse. She rolled a cigarette with the tips of her slender fingers. Then, as they did not wish to ring, they began to hunt about the room for matches. At last they found three on a corner of a side-board, and Clorinde carefully carried them off. Then, with her cigarette between her lips, she sat back in her chair and began to sip her coffee, as she looked smilingly at Rougon.

“Well, I’m quite at your service now,” said the minister with an answering smile. “You want to talk to me ; let us talk.”

Clorinde made a gesture as though to express that what she had to say was of no consequence.

“Yes,” she said ; “I have had a letter from my husband. He is much pleased at having got this mission, thanks to you, but he doesn’t want to be forgotten while he is away over there. But we can talk of all that presently. There’s no hurry about it.”

Then she began to smoke again and to look at Rougon with her irritating smile. The minister had gradually accustomed himself to seeing her without tormenting himself with those mental questions which had formerly so disturbed him. The young woman had now become a part of his regular life, and he accepted her as though he understood all about her and as though her eccentricities no longer caused him the least feeling of surprise. As a matter of fact, however, he knew nothing certain about her even yet ; indeed she was as great a mystery to him as she had been in the first days of their acquaintance. She seemed to be constantly varying, sometimes acting childishly and sometimes showing herself very deep and knowing.

Generally she seemed very foolish and stupid, but she occasionally manifested a singular willingness and assumed airs of soft coaxing tenderness. When she surprised Rougon by some word or gesture which he could not understand, he shrugged his shoulders with an expression of superiority and said that all women behaved in that way. He fancied that he was thus manifesting a supreme contempt for the sex, but his manner merely had the effect of giving a sharpness to Clorinde's smile, a smile that had an air of crafty cruelty about it and which exposed her gleaming teeth between her red lips.

"Why are you looking at me in that way?" Rougon asked her at length, feeling uncomfortable under the steady gaze of her widely opened eyes. "Is there anything about me which displeases you?"

Some hidden thought had just lighted up a gleam in the depths of Clorinde's eyes, and her lips assumed a hard expression. But she quickly broke out again into her charming smile and began to puff out little whiffs of smoke.

"Oh, dear no," she said, "you're very nice. I was thinking about something, my dear fellow. Do you know that you have had great luck?"

"In what way?"

"Yes, you've had great luck. Here you are on the pinnacle you were so anxious to reach. Everybody has helped to lift you there, and events themselves have worked for you."

Rougon was just going to reply when there was a knock at the door. Clorinde instinctively hid her cigarette behind her skirts. It was a clerk with an urgent communication for his excellency. Rougon read it with an air of displeasure and gave the clerk the general idea of the reply he was to make to it. Then he closed the door with a bang and came and took his seat again.

"Yes," he said, "I have certainly been fortunate in possessing devoted friends, and I am now trying to remember them. And you are right, too, in saying that I owe something to the course of events. It often happens that men are quite powerless, unless they are helped by the course of events."

As he said these words in slow deliberate tones he looked at Clorinde, lowering his heavy eyelids and half concealing the fact that he was trying to penetrate her. Why had she spoken of his luck? he wondered. How much did she know of the favourable events to which she had referred? Had Du Poizat

been saying anything to her? But when he saw the smiling dreamy look of her face which seemed softened by the contemplation of some voluptuous recollection, he felt sure that it was something quite different that she was thinking about, and that she knew nothing whatever upon the subject. He himself, too, was accustoming himself to forget, and he did not care to stir up the inner chambers of his memory.

There was a little bit of his life which now seemed hazy and confused to him, and he was beginning to believe that he really owed his high position to the devotion of his friends.

"I didn't want anything," he continued; "I was driven into it in spite of myself. Well, I suppose things have turned out for the best. If I succeed in doing any good, I shall be quite satisfied."

He finished his cup of coffee, and Clorinde rolled another cigarette.

"Do you remember," the young woman asked, "my asking you, two years ago, when you were leaving the Council of State, your reason for your sudden whim? You were very secret and reserved then, but you can speak out now. Come, between ourselves, tell me frankly if you had a definite plan in your mind."

"One always has a plan," he said with reserve. "I felt that I was falling, and I preferred to get down of my own accord."

"And has your plan been fulfilled? Have events happened just as you calculated?"

"Well, hardly quite that. Things never turn out exactly as one calculates. One must be satisfied if one attains one's end somehow."

Then he stopped to offer Clorinde a glass of liqueur.

"Which will you have, curaçoa or chartreuse?"

She chose chartreuse; and, as Rougon was pouring it out, there was another knock at the door. Clorinde again put her cigarette out of sight with a gesture of impatience. Rougon got up angrily from his seat, still keeping the decanter in his hand. This time it was a letter bearing a large seal which was brought for his inspection. When he had glanced at it, he put it into his coat-pocket.

"Very well," he said. "Don't let me be disturbed again."

When he took his place in front of Clorinde again, the young woman was steeping her lips in the chartreuse, drinking it drop by drop. She glanced up at Rougon with glistening eyes. There was a soft, tender look upon her face again.

"No, my dear fellow," she said in low tones, leaning her elbows upon the table, "you will never know all that has been done for you."

Rougon drew his chair closer to hers and, in his turn, rested his elbows upon the table.

"Ah, you will tell me all about that now, won't you?" he cried with animation. "Don't let us have any more mysteries. Tell me all that you yourself did."

She made a little negative sign with her hand as she pressed her cigarette tightly between her lips.

"What, is it something so very dreadful?" Rougon asked. "Are you afraid that I should never be able to repay you? Wait a moment, now; I'm going to try to guess. You wrote to the Pope and you dropped a little bit of consecrated wafer into my water glass without letting me know?"

Clorinde seemed vexed at this pleasantry, and she threatened to leave him if he continued it.

"Don't scoff at religion," she said. "It will bring you misfortune."

Then, waving away with her hand the smoke which she was puffing from her lips and which seemed to be inconveniencing Rougon, she continued in an expressive tone:

"I saw a great many people indeed, and I won you several friends."

She experienced a strong inclination to tell him everything, for she did not want him to remain ignorant of the way in which she had worked for his advantage. This confession was the first instalment of the satisfaction of her patiently hoarded rancour. If Rougon had pressed her, she would have given him precise details.

"Yes, yes," she continued; "I have won over to your side several men who were strongly opposed to you."

Rougon had turned very pale. He had understood what she meant.

"Ah!" was all he said.

He tried to avoid the subject; but Clorinde fixed her large black eyes boldly and calmly upon him, while a smile played over her face.

Then Rougon gave way and began to question her.

"Monsieur de Marsy was one of them, eh?"

Clorinde nodded her head in assent as she blew a whiff of smoke over her shoulder.

"The Chevalier Rusconi?"

Again she nodded her head.

"Monsieur Lebeau, Monsieur de Salneuve, Monsieur Guyot-Laplanche?"

She nodded as each name, but when Rougon mentioned Monsieur de Plouguern, she said no. No, not Monsieur de Plouguern. Then she finished her glass of chartreuse in little sips, while her face wore an expression of triumph.

Rougon had risen from his seat. He walked to the end of the room and then came back and stood behind Clorinde.

"Why wouldn't you let me, then?" he whispered into the back of her neck.

The young woman turned sharply round, fearing that he was going to kiss her hair.

"You? Why, what good would that have been? It would have served no purpose. It is foolish of you to talk like that. I had no need to plead your cause with yourself."

Then, as he looked at her, white with anger, she broke out into a ringing peal of laughter.

"Oh! how simple you are!" she cried. "If I just joke a little, you believe all I say. Surely, my good friend, you don't believe me capable of such things, do you? And all on your account, too! And if I had really done all these dreadful things, you don't imagine that I should have told you, do you? Really, you are very amusing!"

Rougon stood for a moment quite non plussed. The ironical fashion in which she contradicted herself made her more irritating and provoking. Her whole person, her rippling laugh and glistening eyes, confirmed her confessions and repeated them. Rougon was just reaching out his arms to clasp her round the waist, when there was a third knock at the door.

"Well, I don't care, I shall stick to my cigarette this time," Clorinde said.

An usher came into the room, quite out of breath, and stammered out that the Minister of Justice wanted to speak to his excellency. He then cast a furtive glance at the lady he saw smoking.

"Say that I have gone out!" cried Rougon. "I am not at home to any one, do you hear?"

When the usher had bowed and retired backwards from the room, Rougon broke out angrily and brought his fist down heavily upon the table. He was scarcely allowed to breathe!

he cried. Only yesterday they had pursued him even into his dressing-room where he had gone to shave.

Clorinde got up from her chair and walked deliberately to the door.

"Wait a moment," she said, "they sha'n't disturb us again."

And then she quietly turned the key in the lock.

"There!" she exclaimed. "They may knock as much as they like now."

She began to roll a third cigarette as she stood near the window. Rougon imagined that she was now in a humour to surrender herself to him. So he stepped up to her and whispered close to her neck :

"Clorinde."

She stood still, and Rougon continued in deeper tones :

"Clorinde, why won't you?"

She remained perfectly tranquil and unruffled. She shook her head in denial, but so feebly that it seemed as if she wished to encourage him and to lead him further on. He did not dare to touch her ; he had suddenly become timid and seemed to be seeking permission, like a youth paralysed by his first success. He ended, however, by implanting a rough kiss on the back of her neck, just beneath her hair. Then the young woman swung herself round, and with a look and in a tone of scorn she cried :

"Ah ! you've got another attack, then, my friend ? I thought you were quite cured of that. What a strange man you are ! You kiss a woman after eighteen months' consideration of the matter !"

Rougon stood for a moment with downcast head, and then he sprang towards the young woman and seized one of her hands and began to devour it with kisses. She made no attempt to withdraw it from him, but she continued to gibe at him without showing any sign of displeasure.

"Please don't bite my fingers. As long as you don't do that, I don't mind. I should really never have believed it of you ! You had become so serious and steady when I went to see you in the Rue Marbeuf. And now you're turned quite crazy again, just because I told you of some indecencies which I never had an idea of really committing, thank Heaven ! Truly, you're a nice kind of man ! I can't keep up a passion for anything like the time you can. It's all quite over with me. You wouldn't have me, and now I don't want you any longer."

"Hear me," he murmured, "I will do anything you want; I will give you anything you ask."

But the young woman persisted in her refusal, punishing him in his flesh for his old contempt of her, and enjoying, in so doing, a first instalment of her vengeance. She had wanted to see him all-powerful in order to be able to refuse him, and so as to insult his ability as a man.

"Never, never!" she cried, several times over. "Don't you remember what I told you? Never!"

Then Rougon fell ignominiously at her feet. He clasped his arms round her skirts and kissed her knees through the silk of her dress. It was not the soft thin material that Madame Bouchard had worn but a heavy voluminous fabric of provoking thickness, which intoxicated him, too, with its odour. Clorinde merely shrugged her shoulders and abandoned her skirts to him. Then Rougon began to grow bolder, and his hands strayed downwards and sought her feet beneath the edge of her dress.

"Take care!" she said in a quiet voice.

Then, as he disregarded her caution, she touched his forehead with the red-hot end of her cigarette. Rougon recoiled with a cry, and then he made another attempt to throw himself upon her. She escaped him, however, and rushed away and seized hold of the bell-pull that was hanging against the wall beside the mantel-piece.

"I shall ring," she said, "and I shall say that you locked me in."

Rougon swung himself round, holding his hands to his temples, and shaken by a violent tremor. For some moments he stood quite still, feeling as though his head were going to split. He braced himself up stiffly in the hope of calming his feverishness. There was a ringing buzzing in his ears, and his eyes were blinded by ruddy flashing fires.

"I am a brute," he murmured. "It is folly."

Clorinde laughed triumphantly, and began to point a moral. He was wrong, she told him, to despise women. Later on, he would find that there were such things as very clever women. Then she relapsed again into a good-natured playful tone.

"You are not vexed with me, are you? You must never ask me to do that, you know. I don't want to do it. I don't like to think of it."

Rougon paced up and down, full of shame. The young

woman let go of the bell-rope, went and sat down at the table again and compounded herself a glass of sugar and water.

"Well, I got a letter from my husband this morning," she said tranquilly. "I had so much to do this morning that I should probably have broken my promise to come and breakfast with you if I hadn't wanted to show you that letter. See, here it is ! It reminds you of your promises."

Rougon took the letter and read it as he paced about the room. Then he threw it down upon the table in front of Clorinde with a gesture expressive of weariness.

"Well ?" she asked.

Rougon made no immediate reply. He stretched himself and yawned.

"He is a simpleton," he said at last.

Clorinde was greatly offended. For some time past she had not tolerated any appearance of doubt on any one's part as to her husband's capabilities. She bent her head down for a moment and repressed the little rebellious twitchings which were shaking her hands. She was gradually emancipating herself from her disciple-like submissiveness, and she seemed to be draining from Rougon sufficient of his strength to enable her to confront him as a formidable foe.

"If we were to show this letter, it would be all over with him," said the minister, impelled by Clorinde's resistance to try and avenge himself upon her husband. "Ah ! it isn't so easy as you suppose to find a place that he's fit for."

"You are exaggerating, my friend," replied Clorinde, after a short pause. "You used to say that he had a great future before him. He possesses some sterling good qualities ; and it isn't always the sharpest men who go furthest!"

Rougon still continued to pace about the room. He shrugged his shoulders.

"It is to your interest that he should join the ministry," continued Clorinde. "You would have a supporter in him. If it is true, as is reported, that the Minister of Commerce and Agriculture is about to retire, the opportunity is a splendid one. My husband is quite competent to perform the duties of the office, and his mission to Italy would make his selection seem quite natural. You know that the Emperor is very fond of him, and that they get on very well together. They have the same ideas on many subjects. It only wants a word from you to settle the matter."

Rougon took two or three more turns before replying. Then he stopped and stood in front of Clorinde.

"Well, after all, I am quite agreeable. He won't be the only simpleton in office. But I'm doing this solely for your sake, remember. I want to disarm you. Will you ever treat me kindly, I wonder ! You're too vindictive, I'm afraid, aren't you ?"

He spoke playfully, and Clorinde laughed pleasantly as she replied :

"Oh yes, indeed ; I'm very vindictive. I remember things a long time."

Then, as she was going to leave him, he detained her for a moment by the door. He twice squeezed her fingers tightly in his hand, but he did not say another word.

Directly Clorinde left him, Rougon returned to his office. The great room was empty. He sat down at the writing-table and leant his elbows upon his blotting-pad and began to breathe heavily in the surrounding silence. His eyelids dropped, and a deep reverie kept him in a state of sleepy drowsiness for the next ten minutes. Then he started up, stretched himself and rang the bell.

Merle made his appearance in answer to it.

"The prefect of the Somme is still here, isn't he ?" asked Rougon. "Show him in."

The prefect of the Somme came into the room with a pale smiling face, bracing up his short figure. He greeted the minister with formal correctness. Rougon was feeling a little heavy and waited quietly till he had finished. Then he asked him to be seated.

"I'll tell you why I have sent for you, Monsieur le préfet," he began. "There are certain instructions which must be given orally. You are not ignorant of the fact that the revolutionary party is raising its head. We have been within an ace of a frightful catastrophe. The country requires to be reassured, and to feel that it can rely upon the energetic protection of the government. His Majesty has come to the conclusion that some examples must be made, for hitherto his kindness has been strangely abused."

He spoke slowly, reclining in his arm-chair and playing with a large agate seal. The prefect expressed his approval of each of the minister's sentences by a brisk nod of his head.

"Your department," continued Rougon, "is one of the worst. The republican ulcer—"

"I use all my efforts—" the prefect began.

"Don't interrupt me. It is necessary that some very strong repressive steps should be taken there ; and it is to express my views to you upon this subject that I wished to see you. We have been engaged in drawing up a list—"

Then he began to look among his papers, took up a bundle of documents and turned them over one by one.

"It is a return for the whole of France of the number of arrests that are judged necessary. The number for each department is proportionate to the blow which it is intended to strike. I want you to thoroughly understand our object. In the Haute-Marne, for instance, where the republicans are in an infinite minority, there are to be only three arrests. In the Meuse, on the other hand, fifteen. As for your department, the Somme—isn't it?—well, for the Somme, we think—"

He began to turn the papers over again, blinking his heavy eyelids. Then at last he raised his head and looked the prefect in the face.

"Monsieur le préfet, you have twelve arrests to make," he said.

The pale little man bowed.

"Twelve arrests," he repeated. "I understand your excellency perfectly."

He seemed perplexed, however, and as though he were affected by a slight trouble which he did not wish to have discovered. However, at the end of a few minutes' conversation, just as the minister rose to see him to the door, the prefect made up his mind to speak.

"Could your excellency tell me the persons who are to be arrested," he asked.

"Oh ! arrest anybody you like !" Rougon replied. "I can't trouble myself about details. I should never be able to get through the work. Leave Paris this evening and begin your arrests to-morrow. I advise you, however, to strike high. Down in your neighbourhood you have attorneys and merchants and druggists who busy themselves with politics. Just box me up all those fellows. It will have a good effect."

The prefect past his hand across his brow with an anxious expression. He was already ransacking his memory and trying to call to mind the attorneys and merchants and druggists. However, he still continued to nod his head approvingly. But Rougon was not altogether pleased with his hesitating demeanour.

"I won't conceal from you," he said, "that His Majesty is by no means satisfied just now with the administrative staff. There will probably soon be a great change amongst the prefects. We have need of very devoted men in the present grave circumstances."

This affected the prefect like a cut from a whip.

"Your excellency may safely rely upon me," he exclaimed. "I have already fixed upon my men. There is a druggist at Péronne, a cloth-merchant and a paper-maker at Doullens ; and, as for the attorneys, there's no lack of them ; there's a perfect plague of them. Oh, I assure your excellency that I shall have no difficulty in making up the dozen. I am an old servant of the Empire."

He chattered on for a moment or two longer about devoting himself to the saving of the country, and then he took his leave with a very low bow. When he had closed the door behind him, the minister swayed his big body about with an air of doubt. He did not believe in little men. Then, without sitting down again, he drew a red line through *La Somme* upon his list. The names of more than two-thirds of the departments were already scored out in this way. In the room there reigned a stuffy silence that smelt of the dusty green curtains and the odour that seemed to emanate from Rougon's fleshy form.

When he rang again for Merle, he was annoyed to see that the ante-room was still full. He fancied that he recognised the two ladies who were standing by the table.

"I told you to send everybody away !" he cried. "I am going out, and I cannot see anybody else."

"The editor of the *Vœu National* is there," murmured the usher.

Rougon had forgotten all about him. He clasped his hands behind his back, and ordered Merle to show him into the room. The editor was a man of some forty years of age, with a heavy face. He was very carefully dressed.

"Ah ! here you are, sir !" said the minister, roughly. "Things cannot go on like this, I warn you of that."

Then he began to pace about the room, inveighing hotly against the press. It was demoralising everything, bringing about general disorganisation, and inciting to disorder of every kind. The very robbers who stabbed on the high-roads, he said, were preferable to journalists. One might recover from a prick from a dagger, but pens were poisoned. Then he went on

to make still more odious comparisons even than that one ; and gradually he worked himself into a state of excitement, gesticated angrily, and rolled out his words with the loudness of thunder. The editor, who had remained standing all the time, bent his head beneath the storm, while his face wore an expression of submissive consternation.

“ If your excellency would condescend to explain to me,” he ventured at last to say ; “ I don’t quite understand—”

“ What ? ” roared Rougon, furiously.

Then he sprang forward, spread out the newspaper upon his table, and pointed to the columns that were marked with red.

“ There are not ten lines which are not reprehensible ! ” he exclaimed. “ In your leading article, you appear to cast a doubt upon the government’s capacities in the matter of repressive measures. In this paragraph on the second page you appear to be making an illusion to me when you speak of the insolent triumph of parvenus. Amongst your miscellaneous items there are a lot of filthy stories, and brainless attacks upon the upper classes.”

The editor clasped his hands together in great alarm, and tried to interpose a word.

“ I assure your excellency—I am quite in despair that your excellency could suppose for a moment— I, too, who have such a warm admiration for your excellency—”

Rougon, however, paid no attention whatever to this.

“ And the worst of the matter is, sir,” he continued, “ that everyone is aware of your connection with the administration. How is it likely that the other journals will respect us, when the papers in our own pay do not ? All my friends have been denouncing these abominations to me the whole of the morning.”

Then the editor began to declaim against the inculpated matter in harmony with Rougon. He had read none of these articles and paragraphs, he said. He would at once dismiss all his contributors. If his excellency wished it, he would send him a proof-copy of the paper every morning. Rougon, whose anger now seemed mitigated, declined this offer. He had not the time to examine it, he said. Just as he was dismissing the editor, a fresh thought seemed to strike him.

“ Oh, I was forgetting,” he said. “ That woman of good bringing-up who betrays her husband in the novel you are pub-

lishing, supplies a detestable argument against good education. It ought not to be alleged that a reputable woman of that kind could commit such a sin."

"The serial has had a great success," murmured the editor, beginning to feel alarmed again. "I have read it, and I have found it very interesting."

"Ah ! you've read it, have you ? Well, now, does this miserable woman feel remorse in the end ?"

The editor blinked his eyes in astonishment, and tried to remember.

"Remorse ? No, I think not."

Rougon had already opened the door. As he closed it upon the editor, he called out after him :

"It is absolutely necessary that she should feel remorse ! Insist upon the author filling her with remorse !"

CHAPTER X.

ROUGON had written to Du Poizat and Monsieur Kahn asking them to spare him the infliction of an official reception at the gates of Niort. He arrived there one Saturday evening a little before seven o'clock and he at once went to the prefecture with the intention of taking a complete rest till noon on the following day, for he was feeling very tired. After dinner, however, several people called. The news of the minister's arrival had already spread through the town. A small drawing-room near the dining-room was thrown open and a kind of reception was organised. Rougon, as he stood between the two windows, was obliged to stifle his yawns and reply pleasantly to the welcomes that were offered to him.

One of the deputies of the department, the very advocate who had usurped Monsieur Kahn's position as official candidate, was the first to make his appearance. He arrived quite out of breath, wearing a frock-coat and coloured trousers, for which he excused himself upon the ground that he had only just returned on foot from one of his farms, and that he had been anxious to pay his respects to his excellency as soon as possible. Then a little fat man appeared, dressed in a somewhat prim-looking black coat and wearing white gloves. There was an air of ceremonious regret about him. He was the deputy-mayor and had just been informed by his servant of Rougon's arrival. The mayor, he said, would be greatly distressed. He was not expecting his excellency till the next day and was at present at his estate at Les Varades, some six miles away. After the deputy-mayor there filed into the room a procession of six gentlemen with big feet, and big hands, and big heavy faces. The prefect presented them to Rougon as distinguished members of the Statistical Society. Then the principal of the college arrived, bringing with him his wife, a charming blonde of twenty-eight. She came from Paris and her dresses were the wonder of Niort. She expressed to Rougon her great dislike for provincial life.

Monsieur Kahn, who had dined with the minister and the prefect, was hotly plied with questions as to the next day's ceremony. It was arranged that the party would repair to a spot some two or three miles away from the town, in the district known as Les Moulins, where it was intended that a tunnel on the new line from Niort to Angers should be excavated ; and here the Minister of the Interior would fire the first mine. Rougon assumed a homely good-natured manner. He said that he merely wanted to do what he could to honour an old friend's laborious enterprise. He considered himself, too, he said, as an adopted son of the department of Deux-Sèvres, which had in former days sent him to the Legislative Assembly. To tell the truth, however, the real object of his journey was to display himself, in accordance with Du Poizat's strongly urged advice, in the plenitude of power to his old constituents in order to make sure of their support if it should ever become necessary for him to enter the Corps Législatif.

Out of the windows of the little drawing-room the town could be seen black and asleep. No further visitors came. The news of the minister's arrival had come too late in the day. This fact, however, gave an additional feeling of triumph to the zealous ones who put in an appearance at the prefect's. They gave no hint of retiring but seemed quite puffed up with the joy of being the first to meet his excellency in private conversation. The deputy-mayor, in mingled distress and jubilation, repeated in a louder voice than before :

“ Oh dear, how distressed his worship the mayor will be ! And the presiding judge, too, and the public prosecutor and all the other gentlemen ! ”

Towards nine o'clock, however, it might have been supposed that all the town was in the ante-room. There was a trampling sound of feet heard there. Then a servant came into the drawing-room and announced that the commissary of police desired to be allowed to pay his respects to his excellency. It was Gilquin who now made his appearance ; Gilquin, looking quite gorgeous in evening dress and straw-coloured gloves and kid boots. Du Poizat had given him a place in his department. Gilquin conducted himself very well, and the only traces of his old manner were a somewhat swaggering motion of his shoulders and a marked disinclination to part with his hat, which he persisted in holding somewhat tilted against his hip after a position which he had carefully studied on a tailor's fashion-plate. He

bowed to Rougon and addressed him with an air of exaggerated humility.

"I venture to recall myself," he said, "to the kind recollection of your excellency, whom I have had the honour of meeting several times in Paris."

Rougon smiled, and he and Gilquin chatted together for a moment or two. Then the latter made his way into the dining-room where tea had just been served. There he found Monsieur Kahn engaged in glancing over the lists of guests who had been invited to the next day's ceremony. In the little drawing-room the conversation had now turned upon the grandeur of the Emperor's reign. Du Poizat, standing by Rougon's side, was extolling the Empire, and they both bowed to each other in the midst of the clustering citizens of Niort, whose faces were wrapt in respectful admiration, as though they were congratulating each other upon some personal achievement.

"What clever fellows they are, eh?" said Gilquin, who was observing the scene through the open doorway.

Then, as he proceeded to pour some rum into his tea, he gave Monsieur Kahn's elbow a nudge. Du Poizat, lean and enthusiastic, with his irregular white teeth and his flushed childish face glowing with triumph, appeared to amuse Gilquin.

"Ah, you should have seen him when he first arrived in the department," he said, in low tones. "I was with him. He stamped his feet angrily as he walked along. He's bound to feel a grudge against the people here; and since he's got his prefecture he has been enjoying himself by paying off the scores of his youthful grievances. The townspeople who knew him in the days when he was a poor miserable fellow don't feel inclined to smile now when he goes past, I can tell you. He makes a strong prefect; he's quite cut out for the post. He's very different from that fellow Langlade whom he superseded, a mere ladies' man and as pale as a girl. We came across a lot of photographs of ladies in very low dresses amongst the papers in his room."

Then Gilquin stopped speaking for a moment. He fancied he saw that the wife of the principal was keeping her eyes fixed upon him. Desirous of displaying the graces of his manly chest, he bent forward to speak to Monsieur Kahn again.

"Have you heard of Du Poizat's meeting with his father?" he asked. "Oh, it's the most amusing story in the world. The old man, you know, is a retired bailiff who has got to-

gether a pretty penny by lending small sums for short periods at a high rate of interest, and he now lives like a wolf in an old ruin of a house, keeping loaded guns in the entrance-hall. Du Poizat, for whom his father had prophesied the gallows a score of times, had been for a long time dreaming of having his revenge. That, indeed, was one of his chief reasons for wanting to be prefect here. So one morning he puts on his finest uniform, and, under the pretext of going off on a round, he goes and knocks at the old man's door. Then there is a good quarter of an hour's parleying, and at last his father opens the door. The little pale old man gazes with a stupefied look at the gold-laced uniform. Well, now, guess what is the first thing he says, as soon as he discovers that his son is the prefect ! 'Don't send any more for the taxes, Léopold !' He didn't show the slightest surprise or emotion. When Du Poizat came back, he was biting his lips and his face was as white as a sheet. His father's unruffled tranquillity had quite exasperated him. Ah ! he'll never manage to subdue the old man !'

Monsieur Kahn nodded his head discreetly. He had slipped the list of guests into his pocket and was now sipping a cup of tea while he glanced into the adjoining room.

"Rougon is half asleep," he said. "These imbeciles ought to have the sense to leave him and let him get to bed. I want him to be in good form for to-morrow."

"I haven't seen him for some time," said Gilquin. "He has put on more flesh."

Then, lowering his voice, he continued :

"They managed it very cleverly, those fine fellows ! They worked some quiet trick or other out of the information I gave them. Rougon pretends, however, that he went to the prefecture and that no one would believe him. Well, that's his business and there's no occasion to say any more about it. Du Poizat paid me with a famous breakfast at a café on the boulevards. Oh ! what a day we had ! We went to a theatre in the evening, I think, but I haven't a very distinct recollection, and I slept for two days afterwards."

Monsieur Kahn appeared to find Gilquin's confidences a little trying, and he got up and left the dining-room. Then Gilquin, left to himself, felt quite convinced that the principal's wife was certainly gazing at him. He went back into the drawing-room and busied himself about her and ended by taking her some tea with some little cakes and a bun. He

really bore himself very well, and he looked liked a gentleman who had been negligently brought up, which appeared to affect the beautiful blonde in his favour.

The deputy was now engaged in demonstrating the necessity of having a new church at Niort ; the deputy-mayor demanded a bridge ; the principal urged the desirability of extending the college buildings, while the six members of the Statistical Society silently nodded approval of everything.

“ Well, we will see about these matters to-morrow, gentlemen,” said Rougon, whose eyelids were half-closed. “ I am here for the purpose of inquiring into your needs and doing what I can to satisfy them.”

Ten o’clock was just striking when a servant came into the room and said something to the prefect, who then bent forward and whispered a few words into the minister’s ear. The latter then hastened out of the drawing-room. Madame Correur was waiting for him in an adjoining apartment. She was accompanied by a tall slight girl with a washed-out face spotted with reddish blotches.

“ So you are in Niort, are you ? ” Rougon exclaimed.

“ Only since this afternoon,” replied Madame Correur. “ We are staying just opposite, on the Place de la Préfecture, at the Hôtel de Paris.”

Then she explained that she had come from Coulanges, where she had been spending a couple of days. But suddenly she paused to direct the minister’s attention to the tall girl who was with her.

“ Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq, who has been kind enough to accompany me,” she said.

Herminie Billecoq made a ceremonious reverence and then Madame Correur proceeded :

“ I didn’t say anything to you about this expedition of mine, because I thought you might oppose it ; but I couldn’t resist going. I was very anxious to see my brother. When I heard of your coming to Niort, I hastened here. We looked out for you and saw you entering the prefecture, but we thought it better to defer our visit till later on. These little towns are so given to malicious scandal ! ”

Rougon nodded his head assentingly. He was thinking that plump Madame Correur with her painted face and bright yellow dress might, to provincial eyes, very well appear to be a somewhat compromising person.

"Well, and did you see your brother?" he asked.

"Yes," Madame Correur replied, clenching her teeth; "yes, I saw him. Madame Martineau didn't venture to turn me out of the house. She was burning some sugar over the fire when I went in, and she seized up the shovel. Oh, my poor brother! I knew that he was ill, but it gave me quite a shock to see him so emaciated. He has promised that he won't disinherit me; it would be contrary to his principles. He has made his will; and his property will be divided between me and Madame Martineau. Isn't that so, Herminie?"

"The property will be divided," the tall girl declared. "He told you so when you first got there, and he repeated it when he saw you away from the door. Oh no! there's no doubt about it; I heard him say so."

Rougon now tried to get the two women to take their leave by saying:

"I'm delighted to hear it. You will feel much easier now. These family-quarrels always get made up. Well, good night; I'm going to bed now."

But Madame Correur detained him. She had taken her handkerchief out of her pocket and was dabbing her eyes with it, seemingly affected with a sudden paroxysm of grief.

"Oh my poor Martineau! He has been so kind and good, and he forgave me with such readiness! I wish you knew how good he is, my dear friend. It is on his account that I have hurried here, to petition you in his favour—"

Her tears prevented her saying more, and she began to sob. Rougon was at a loss to know what it all meant, and he looked at the two women in astonishment. Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq also began to cry, but less demonstratively than Madame Correur. She was a very sensitive young person and was readily affected by another's grief.

"Monsieur Martineau has compromised himself in politics," she stammered out through her tears.

Then Madame Correur began to speak with great volubility.

"You will remember," she said, "that I hinted my fears to you one day. I had a presentiment of what would happen. Martineau was showing republican proclivities. At the last election he behaved very wildly, and made the most desperate exertions in favour of the opposition candidate. I was aware of this but I didn't want to mention it. But now I can see that he's going to get himself into serious trouble. When I got to the

Golden Lion at Coulonges, where we had engaged a room, I questioned the people there, and I learnt a good deal more from them. Martineau has been guilty of all kinds of follies. No one in the neighbourhood would be the least surprised if he were to be arrested. Every day they expect to see the gendarmes come and take him off. You can imagine what a shock this was to me! Then I thought of you, my dear friend—”

Her utterance was again choked by her sobs. Rougon tried to reassure her. He would mention the subject, he said, to Du Poizat, and he would stop any warrant that might have been issued.

“I am the master,” he even went so far as to say; “go to bed and sleep quietly.”

Madame Correur, however, shook her head, and twisted her pocket-handkerchief in her hands. Her eyes were quite dry now.

“Ah! you don’t know all,” she said. “It is a more serious matter than you suppose. He takes Madame Martineau to mass, and stays outside the door himself, and proclaims that he never sets foot in a church; and this causes a dreadful scandal every Sunday. He frequents the company of a retired attorney in the neighbourhood, one of the men of ‘48, and he can be heard talking to him for hours at a time in the most dreadful way. Suspicious-looking men, too, have often been seen to slip into his garden at night-time, with the intention, doubtless, of receiving directions from him.”

Rougon shrugged his shoulders at each fresh detail. Then Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq, as though shocked at such tolerance, added sharply:

“And he receives letters with red seals from all sorts of countries. The postman told us that. He didn’t want to speak about it at first, and he turned quite pale. We had to give him twenty sous. And then, a month ago, Monsieur Martineau was away from home for a week, without anyone in the neighbourhood having the slightest idea where he was. The landlady of the Golden Lion told us that he hadn’t even taken any luggage with him.”

“Herminie, I beg of you to be quiet!” said Madame Correur, uneasily. “Martineau has got quite sufficient against him as it is. There is no occasion for us to add any more.”

Rougon was blinking his eyes, and glancing at the two women in turn. He had become very serious.

“If he has compromised himself so much as that—” he began.

He fancied he could see a fiery gleam shining in Madame Correur’s troubled eyes.

“Well, I will do all I can,” he continued ; “but I make no promises.”

“It is all up with him ; it is all up with him !” exclaimed Madame Correur. “I feel quite certain of it. We don’t want to say anything ; but if we told all—”

She interrupted herself, and began to bite her pocket-handkerchief.

“And to think that I who haven’t seen him for twenty years, should only just see him to be parted from him for ever, perhaps ! He has been so kind, so very kind !”

Herminie now began to sway her shoulders about slightly. She was making signs to Rougon, as if to tell him that he must excuse a sister’s despair, and that the old attorney was a great rascal.

“If I were you,” she said to Madame Correur, “I would tell everything. It will be much the best.”

Then the elder woman seemed to be bracing herself up for a great effort.

“You remember,” she said, lowering her voice, “the *Te Deums* which were sung everywhere, when the Emperor so miraculously escaped being murdered in front of the opera house ? Well, on the very day when they were singing the *Te Deum* at Coulonges, one of Martineau’s neighbours asked him if he wasn’t going to church, and the wretched man replied, ‘What should I go to church for ? I don’t care a straw about your Emperor !’”

“I don’t care a straw about your Emperor !” Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq repeated with an air of consternation.

“You can understand my alarm now,” continued the retired boarding-house keeper. “As I told you before, no one in the neighbourhood would be the least surprised to see him arrested.”

As she uttered this last sentence, she fixed her eyes searchingly upon Rougon. The minister made no immediate reply. He seemed to be trying to read Madame Correur’s fat, soft face, with her two pale eyes blinking beneath the scanty light hair of her eyebrows. His gaze rested for a moment on her plump white neck. Then he threw out his arms and said :

“I can do nothing, I assure you. I am not the master.”

Then he gave his reasons. He felt scruples, he said, in interfering in affairs of this kind. If the law had been invoked,

matters would have to take their course. It would have been better if he had not known Madame Correur, he remarked, as his friendship for her would tie his hands, for he had sworn never to render certain services to friends. However, he would inquire into the matter. Then he began to try to console Madame Correur, as though her brother were already on his way to some penal settlement. She bent down her head, and her sobs shook the great coil of light hair which lay upon the nape of her neck. Presently she grew calmer, and then, as she was taking leave of Rougon, she pushed Herminie in front of her, and said :

“ Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq ; but I believe I have already presented her to you. Please excuse me, my head is so bad. She is the young lady for whom we succeeded in obtaining a dowry. The officer who seduced her has not yet been able to marry her on account of the interminable formalities which have to be gone through. Thank his excellency, my dear.”

The tall girl expressed her thanks, blushing, as she did so, like some innocent maiden in whose presence some indelicate remark has been made. Madame Correur let her go out of the room before her ; then she pressed Rougon’s hand tightly, and, bending towards him, she said :

“ I am relying upon you, Eugène !”

When the minister returned into the little drawing-room, he found it deserted. Du Poizat had succeeded in getting rid of the deputy, the deputy-mayor, and the six members of the Statistical Society. Monsieur Kahn had also taken his departure, after having made an appointment for ten o’clock the next morning. In the dining-room there only remained the principal’s wife and Gilquin, who were eating little cakes, and talking about Paris. Gilquin was making soft eyes, and telling the lady about the races, and the picture-shows, and a new piece at the Comédie Française, with the ease of a man to whom all kinds of life were familiar. The principal, in the meantime, was speaking in a low tone to the prefect about the master of the fourth form who was suspected of republican propensities.

Eleven o’clock now struck. The remaining visitors rose and bowed to his excellency, and Gilquin was just about to retire with the principal’s wife, to whom he offered his arm, when Rougon detained him.

“ Monsieur le Commissaire,” he said, “ a word with you, I beg.”

When they were left alone together, he addressed himself to the commissary and prefect simultaneously.

"What is this business of Martineau's?" he asked. "Has the man really compromised himself?"

Gilquin smiled, and Du Poizat proceeded to give Rougon a few details about the matter.

"I wasn't thinking of taking any steps in the affair," he said. "The man has certainly been denounced to me, and I have received letters about him. There is no doubt but what he mixes himself up in politics. But there have already been four arrests in the department, and I should have preferred making up my five, which was the number you fixed for the department, by locking up the master of the fourth form here who reads revolutionary books to his pupils."

"I have been told some very grave facts," said Rougon, sternly. "His sister's tears must not be allowed to save this man Martineau, if he is really so dangerous as is alleged. The public safety is at stake."

Then he turned towards Gilquin.

"What is your opinion on the matter?" he asked.

"I shall proceed to arrest him in the morning," the commissary replied. "I know all about the matter. I have seen Madame Correur at the Hôtel de Paris, where I generally dine."

Du Poizat made no objection. He took a little memorandum-book from his pocket, and struck out a name, and wrote another in its place, at the same time recommending, the commissary of police to keep his eye upon the master of the fourth form. Rougon accompanied Gilquin to the door.

"This man Martineau is not very well, I believe," he said. "Go to Coulonges yourself, and treat him decently."

Gilquin pulled himself up with an offended air. He lost all his show of respect for his excellency, and cried familiarly :

"Do you take me for a mere common policeman? Ask Du Poizat to tell you about the druggist whom I arrested in bed on the day before yesterday. There was a clerk's wife with him in the bed, but no one knows anything at all about it. I always act with the greatest discretion."

Rougon slept soundly for nine hours. When he opened his eyes the next morning, at about half-past eight, he sent a message for Du Poizat to come to him. The prefect arrived with a cigar in his mouth, and seemed in high spirits. They talked and joked together as they had done in former days, when they

lodged at Madame Mélanie Correur's, and used to awaken each other by slaps on their naked legs. While the minister was washing himself, he questioned the prefect about the neighbourhood, and asked for particulars about the different officials and their various desires and vanities. He wanted to be able to have a pleasant remark ready for each of them.

"Oh, don't bother yourself," said Du Poizat, with a laugh ; "I will be ready to prompt you."

Then he proceeded to give him information about the different people with whom he would come into contact. Rougon occasionally made him repeat what he said in order to impress it upon his memory. At ten o'clock, Monsieur Kahn made his appearance. They all three breakfasted together, and finally arranged the details of the ceremony. The prefect would make a speech, as would also Monsieur Kahn. Rougon would follow the latter ; but they considered that a fourth speech would be desirable. For a moment, they thought of the mayor, but Du Poizat said that he was a stupid fellow and advised the selection of the chief surveyor of bridges and highways, to whom the proceedings of the day seemed naturally to point, though Monsieur Kahn was afraid of his spirit of criticism. As they got up from table, Monsieur Kahn took the minister aside, and impressed upon him the points which he hoped he would bring strongly forward in his speech.

It had been arranged that the party should meet at the prefecture at half-past ten. The mayor and his deputy arrived together. The former stammeringly expressed his unbounded regret that he had been away from Niort on the previous evening, while the latter hoped that his excellency had slept well and had quite recovered from his fatigue. Then the President of the Civil Tribunal, the public prosecutor and his two deputies, and the chief surveyor of bridges and highways made their appearance. They were quickly followed by the receiver-general, the surveyor of taxes and the registrar of the department. Several of these officials were accompanied by their wives. The wife of the principal of the college, the beautiful blonde, who wore a most effective sky-blue dress, attracted great attention. She begged his excellency to excuse her husband, who had been prevented from coming by an attack of gout which had seized him soon after he returned home on the previous evening. Other guests continued to arrive ; the colonel of the seventy-eighth regiment, which was stationed at

Niort, the president of the Tribunal of Commerce, the two local magistrates, and the conservator of rivers and forests, accompanied by his three daughters, municipal councillors, and delegates from the consultative chamber of arts and manufactures, and from the statistical society, and from the council of experts.

The reception was held in the great drawing-room of the prefecture. Du Poizat made the presentations, and the minister received all the guests with his smiling bows as though they were old friends. He exhibited a wonderful knowledge about each of them. He spoke to the public prosecutor of a speech lately made by him in the course of a trial for adultery ; he inquired, in sympathetic tones, of the surveyor of taxes after the health of his wife, who had been confined to her bed for the last two months ; he detained the colonel of the seventy-eighth for a moment or two to let him see that he was not ignorant of the brilliant career of his son at Saint Cyr ; he talked about boots to a municipal councillor, who owned a great boot-making establishment ; and with the registrar, who was an enthusiastic archæologist, he discussed a druidical stone which had been discovered during the previous week. Whenever he hesitated and seemed to be thinking of the right thing to say, Du Poizat came to his assistance and cleverly prompted him in a whisper.

As the president of the Tribunal of Commerce came into the room and bowed to him, Rougon exclaimed, in an affable voice :

“ Ah ! are you alone, Monsieur le président ? I trust that we shall have the pleasure of seeing your wife at the banquet this evening—”

He stopped short upon seeing an expression of embarrassment on the faces around him. Du Poizat was casting very significant glances at him. Then he recollects that the president of the Tribunal of Commerce was living apart from his wife in consequence of certain scandals. The minister had made a mistake. He thought that he was addressing himself to the other president, the president of the Civil Tribunal. But he was in no way disconcerted. He still continued to smile, and, making no reference to his unfortunate remark, he continued, with a confidential air :

“ I have a pleasant piece of news for you, monsieur. I know that my colleague, the Minister of Justice, has got your name

down for a decoration. Perhaps I ought not to mention it, but you will keep my secret."

The president of the Tribunal of Commerce turned quite scarlet. He almost choked with joy. His friends pressed round him to congratulate him, while Rougon made a mental note of this cross, which he had so opportunely thought of bestowing, so as to avoid forgetting to mention the matter to his colleague. It was the betrayed husband that he was decorating. Du Poizat smiled with admiration.

There were now some fifty people in the great drawing-room. They still waited on ; and the faces of many of them were beginning to show signs of weariness.

"Time is getting on ; we might be thinking of making a start," said the minister.

But the prefect bent towards him, and remarked that the deputy, Monsieur Kahn's former opponent, had not yet come. Presently, the latter made his appearance, perspiring profusely. His watch, he said, had stopped, and had quite put him out of his reckoning. Then, wishing to let the company know of his visit on the previous evening to the minister, he commenced a remark, in a loud voice :

"As I was saying to your excellency last night—" Then he stepped up to Rougon's side and informed him that he intended returning to Paris the following morning. The Easter recess had terminated on the previous Tuesday, and the Chamber was again sitting. He had considered, however, he continued, that it was his duty to remain for a few days longer at Niort in order to welcome his excellency to the department.

All the guests now proceeded into the court-yard of the prefecture, where ten carriages, drawn up on both sides of the steps, were awaiting them. The minister, the deputy, the prefect and the mayor got into the first one. The rest of the guests got in as best they could. Besides the ten carriages there were a couple of barouches, three victorias, and some cars with seats for six or eight. The procession was organised in the Rue de la Préfecture. They started off at a gentle trot. The ladies' ribbons streamed in the air, and their skirts rose up over the doors of the carriages. The gentlemen's black hats shone brightly in the sun. The procession had to pass through a considerable section of the town ; and the rough pavement of the narrow streets jolted the carriages dreadfully making them make as much noise as if they had been wherries laden with iron.

The town's-people crowded to the doors and windows and bowed in silence as the procession went past, looking out for his excellency, and feeling quite surprised when they saw the minister's plain civilian frock-coat beside the prefect's gold-laced uniform.

On leaving the town, the procession passed along a wide road, planted with magnificent trees. It was a warm, pleasant, April day. The sky was clear and the sun shone brightly. The road, which was straight and level, lay through the midst of gardens gay with blossoming lilacs and apricot trees. Presently they were in the midst of widely spreading cultivated fields, dotted here and there with clumps of trees.

"That's a flax factory, isn't it ?" asked Rougon, towards whose ear the prefect had just bent.

"A factory which belongs to you, I believe," he continued, addressing himself to the mayor, and calling his attention to a red brick building on the bank of the river. "I have heard of your new system of carding. I hope to be able to find a little time to go and inspect all those wonders."

Then he began to ask questions as to the motive power of the river. In his opinion, he said, hydraulic power, under favourable conditions, possessed enormous advantages. He quite astonished the mayor by the amount of technical knowledge he displayed. The other carriages followed on in a somewhat irregular fashion. Sounds of conversations, bristling with figures, could be heard in the midst of the jog-trot of the horses. A rippling laugh attracted everyone's attention. It came from the principal's wife, whose sun-shade had just flown away and fallen on to a heap of stones.

"You have a farm about here, haven't you ?" Rougon asked of the deputy with a smile. "That's it on the hill there, if I'm not mistaken. What splendid meadows ! I know, too, that you interest yourself in cattle-breeding, and that you have won several prizes at recent shows."

Then they began to talk about cattle. The meadows lay in the sunshine like soft green velvet. They were flecked all over with wild flowers. Clusters of tall poplars fringed the horizon here and there, forming charming bits of landscape. An old woman leading an ass was obliged to stop at the side of the road to let the procession go past. The ass, frightened by the sight of so many carriages with their panels gleaming in the sun, began to bray ; but the gaily dressed ladies

and gloved gentlemen kept their countenances perfectly serious.

The procession now mounted up a slight hill to the left, and then descended again. They had now reached the scene of the ceremony. It was a sort of *cul-de-sac*, a hollow gap in the open country, walled in on three sides by hills. Nothing broke upon the prospect save the ruins of a couple of wind-mills. In this hollow, in the centre of a patch of grass, a tent of grey canvas, bordered with a wide stripe of crimson, had been set up ; and its four sides were decorated with trophies of banners. A crowd of sightseers, whose curiosity had induced them to walk over, had taken up their position on the right, on the shady side, skirting the crescent formed by one of the hills. A detachment of the seventy-eighth regiment was drawn up in front of the tent, opposite to the Niort firemen, whose admirable bearing was much noticed. A gang of workmen in new blouses, with engineers in frock-coats at their head, was stationed along the edge of the grass. As soon as the carriages appeared, the Niort Philharmonic Society, a society composed of amateur instrumentalists, began to play the overture to “*La Dame Blanche*.”

“Long live his excellency !” cried out several voices, though they were drowned by the sound of the instruments.

Rougon alighted from his carriage. He raised his eyes, and looked about the hollow in which he found himself, feeling vexed at the shut-in appearance of the place, which seemed to him to detract from the impressiveness of the ceremony. He stood for a moment on the grass, waiting for some one to come and receive him. Presently Monsieur Kahn hastened up. He had left the prefecture immediately after the breakfast and he had just been to examine the mine which his excellency was to fire to see if all were right. He conducted the minister into the tent ; and then the guests followed. There was a slight confusion for a moment or two. Rougon began to ask for some particulars of the proposed operations.

“It is here, then, that the tunnel is to commence ?”

“Exactly,” replied Monsieur Kahn. “The first mine has been laid in that reddish rock where your excellency sees a flag.”

The hill-side at the end of the hollow had been broken by picks and disclosed the rock to view. Uprooted trees were lying about amongst the excavations, and the trench was

littered over with leaves. Monsieur Kahn pointed out with his hand the course the line would take. It was traced out by a double line of stakes through a stretch of grass-land, and thickets and bye-paths. It was a pretty piece of quiet country that they were going to grub up.

The guests and officials had by this time entered the tent. The curious sightseers were bending forward to get a glimpse through the opening. The Philharmonic Society was just finishing the overture of "*La Dame Blanche*."

"Monsieur le ministre," suddenly said a shrill voice which vibrated through the silence, "it is my privilege to be the first to thank your excellency for having so kindly accepted the invitation which we ventured to address to you. The department of Deux-Sèvres will ever preserve a grateful recollection—"

It was Du Poizat who had just begun to speak. He was some three yards from Rougon ; both himself and the minister were standing, and at certain of the speaker's sentences they slightly bowed their heads to each other. The prefect went on speaking in this strain for a good quarter of an hour. He reminded the minister of the brilliant fashion in which he had represented the department in the Legislative Assembly. The town of Niort, he said, had inscribed his name in its annals as that of a benefactor, and it longed for any occasion upon which it might show its gratitude. Every now and then his voice was quite lost in the air, and only his gestures could be seen, an even, regular working of his right arm ; and the crowd of sight-seers ranged on the hill-side gave their attention to the gold embroidery on his sleeve, which flashed brightly in the sunshine.

Then Monsieur Kahn stepped into the middle of the tent. He had a very deep voice, and he seemed to quite bark out some of his words. The hill-side gave an echo which repeated the end of the sentences upon which he lingered too complacently. He spoke of all the long efforts and considerations and toilsome steps which had devolved upon him during nearly four years in his struggle to obtain a new line for the neighbourhood. Now, every kind of prosperity would rain down upon the department. The fields would be fertilized ; the factories would double their productions ; and commerce would make its way into the humblest villages. To hear him talk, one would have supposed that Deux-Sèvres was through his exertions about to become a sort of fairy-land, with rivers of milk and enchanted woods,

where tables loaded with good things would await every passer-by. Then he suddenly began to affect an exaggerated modesty. They owed him, he said, no gratitude whatever. He himself could never have carried out such a vast scheme without the high patronage of which he was so proud. Then he turned towards Rougon and called him "the illustrious minister, the promoter and supporter of every useful and noble idea." In conclusion, he dwelt upon the financial advantages of the scheme. At the Bourse, he said, people were quite fighting to get hold of the shares. Happy were those who had been able to invest their money in an enterprise with which his Excellency the Minister of the Interior had been willing to connect his name!

"Hear! hear!" cried some of the guests.

The mayor and several of the officials who were present grasped Monsieur Kahn's hand. He affected to be greatly moved. Outside there were bursts of cheering. The Philharmonic Society felt that it was its duty to commence a quick march, but the deputy-mayor sprang forward and sent a fireman to silence them. In the meantime, the chief surveyor of bridges and highways was standing hesitating inside the tent. He had not prepared a speech, he said. However, as the prefect pressed him, he gave way. Monsieur Kahn seemed very uneasy, and he murmured into the latter's ear:

"You've made a mistake. He's sure to say something nasty."

The chief surveyor was a tall, lean man, who considered himself possessed of great powers of irony. He spoke slowly, and he gave a twist to the corners of his mouth every time he delivered himself of one of his epigrammatic thrusts. He began his speech by overwhelming Monsieur Kahn with a torrent of praises. Then he went on to make some of his unpleasant remarks, and criticised the projected railway with the contempt of a government engineer for the plans and designs of a private one. He referred to the opposition scheme of the Western Company, which had contemplated letting the line run past Thouars, and he laid much stress, without seeming to do so maliciously, upon the fact that the loop in Monsieur Kahn's plan would be of the greatest benefit to the blast-furnaces at Bressuire. There was nothing obviously bitter in what he said, but his pleasant sentences were full of cutting thrusts which could be felt only by the initiated. He grew still more cruel

at the end of his speech, expressing his regret that “the illustrious minister” ran some risk of compromising himself by his connection with an undertaking the financial prospects of which were a source of disquietude to all men of experience. Enormous sums of money would be wanted, he said, as well as the greatest integrity and most unselfish disinterestedness. Then, in conclusion, he gave his mouth a twist and ended in this fashion :

“That these fears, however, are quite chimerical we can have no doubt, when we see at the head of the undertaking a man whose wealth and high commercial probity are so well known throughout the department.”

A murmur of applause ran through the audience. A few of those who were present glanced at Monsieur Kahn, who was forcing himself to smile, though his lips were very pale. Rougon had listened with his eyes half closed, as though he were feeling inconvenienced by the brightness of the light. When he opened them again there was a stern look about them. His original intention had been to make merely a very brief speech, but he now felt that he had to defend one of his own band. He stepped to the edge of the tent, and then, with a sweeping gesture that seemed to take the whole of France within the circle of his audience, he began :

“Gentlemen, let me in imagination overleap these hills which surround us and embrace the whole empire in one field of view, and so confer an additional importance upon the ceremony which has brought us together by making of it a festival of industrial and commercial labour. At this very moment, while I am now addressing you, from the North to the South canals are being excavated, railway lines are being laid down, mountains are being tunnelled, bridges are being built—”

There was a hushed silence all round. Not a sound broke upon the speaker’s words save the rustling of the branches or the grating of some river-lock in the distance. The firemen, in full dress drawn up with the soldiers beneath the hot sun, cast side-long glances, without turning their necks, to get a sight of the minister. The spectators on the hill-side were now taking their ease. The ladies had spread their handkerchiefs upon the ground and were sitting upon them. Two gentlemen, who were beginning to feel affected by the heat of the sun, had just opened out their wives’ parasols. Rougon’s voice grew gradually louder and louder. He seemed to be suffering from a feeling of restraint at being shut up in this

narrow valley, as though it were not wide enough to afford him sufficient space for his gesticulations. As he threw his hands energetically in front of him, it appeared as if he wanted to sweep away all obstructions and open out a wider horizon for himself. Twice he gazed up into the air, but nothing met his eyes save the gutted ruins of the windmills which lay cracked and split in the sun.

He took up Monsieur Kahn's text and expatiated upon it. It was not, he said, the department of Deux-Sèvres alone that was about to enter upon an era of wonderful prosperity, but the whole of France, thanks to the branch line from Niort to Angers. For ten minutes he recounted the innumerable advantages which would be showered down upon the people. He even went so far as to make allusions to the hand of God. Then he began to reply to what had been said by the chief surveyor, though he in no way discussed it or even made any reference to it. He simply said the direct opposite of what the surveyor had said, dwelling a long time upon Monsieur Kahn's devotion, and showing his great modesty and disinterestedness and nobility of mind. The financial aspect of the matter, he said, caused him no uneasiness whatever ; and he smiled and seemed to be sweeping up big piles of gold with a rapid movement of his hands.

An outburst of cheering quite drowned his voice.

“One word in conclusion, gentlemen,” he said, after wiping his lips with his handkerchief.

The one word in conclusion lasted for a quarter of an hour. He was growing excited, and went further than he had meant to do ; and, in his peroration, as he was speaking of the grandeur of the reign, and extolling the Emperor's great ability, he even hinted that his majesty would bestow his patronage in a special manner upon the branch line from Niort to Angers. The undertaking would be a State affair.

Three great bursts of cheers broke out from the audience. A flight of crows which were skimming high up in the air through the cloudless sky took fright, and flew off with much noisy croaking. Immediately after the last sentence of the minister's speech, the Philharmonic Society began to play again, a signal being given from the tent; while all the ladies sprang smartly up, anxious not to miss anything of the ceremony. The guests were smiling around Rougon with delighted faces. The mayor, the public prosecutor, and the colonel of the seventy-eighth regiment,

nodded their heads approvingly as the deputy expressed to them his admiration of his excellency in low tones, but loud enough for the minister to hear. However, it was the chief surveyor of bridges and highways, who manifested the greatest enthusiasm. He displayed an extraordinary amount of obsequiousness, and seemed quite thunderstruck by the great man's magnificent eloquence.

"Would your excellency do me the honour to follow me?" now asked Monsieur Kahn, whose fat face was perspiring with pleasure.

The concluding part of the ceremony was now at hand. His excellency was about to fire the first mine. Orders had just been given to a gang of navvies wearing new blouses. The men preceded the minister and Monsieur Kahn into the trench, and drew themselves up in two lines at the bottom of it. A foreman held a piece of lighted rope in his hand, and presented it to Rougon. The guests and officials, who had remained in the tent, craned their heads forward. Everyone waited anxiously. The Philharmonic Society was still playing.

"Will it make a very big noise?" the principal's wife asked, with an uneasy smile, of one of the public prosecutor's assessors.

"That depends upon the nature of the rock," hastily interposed the president of the tribunal of commerce, beginning to enter upon various mineralogical explanations.

"I shall stuff up my ears," murmured the eldest of the three daughters of the conservator of rivers and forests.

Rougon felt that he was looking very foolish, standing in the midst of all these people with the flaming rope in his hand. Up above, on the crests of the hills, the ruined windmills were creaking louder than ever. Then he hastened to light the fuse, the end of which, lying between two stones, was pointed out to him by the foreman. One of the navvies immediately blew a long blast upon a horn, and then all the gang hurried off. Monsieur Kahn hastily pulled his excellency back into the tent, and manifested an anxious solicitude for his safety.

"Well, why doesn't it go off?" stammered the registrar, who was blinking his eyes nervously, and would have very much liked to close his ears, as the ladies were doing.

The explosion did not take place till after the expiration of two minutes. It had been considered prudent to have a very long fuse. The straining expectation of the company was be-

coming quite painful. Every eye was fixed upon the red rock. Some of the spectators fancied they could see it moving, and some of the timid ones expressed a fear of being struck by the fragments. At last there was a dull reverberation, and the rock broke into pieces, while a number of fragments twice the size of a man's fist shot up into the air in the midst of the smoke. Then everyone went away ; and on all sides one could hear the self-same question repeated, "Don't you smell the powder?"

In the evening, the prefect gave a dinner, at which the officials and functionaries were present. For the ball which followed, he had issued five hundred invitations. It was a splendid affair. The great drawing-room was decorated with green plants ; and in each of the corners a small chandelier had been fixed, and the candles of these, combined with those of the central chandelier, flooded the room with a brilliant light. Niort could remember no such scene of magnificence. The light that streamed from the six windows quite illuminated the Place de la Prefecture, where a crowd of more than two thousand curious sightseers had gathered together, straining their eyes up into the air in their eager attempts to catch a sight of the dancers. The band could be heard so distinctly that the children in the street got up galops on the footways. From nine o'clock the ladies were fanning themselves, refreshments were being carried round, and quadrilles followed upon waltzes and polkas. Du Poizat was standing by the door, smilingly receiving the late arrivals.

"Doesn't your excellency dance ?" the principal's wife boldly asked of Rougon. She had just arrived, and was wearing a dress of tarlatan, spangled with gold stars.

Rougon excused himself with a smile. He was standing in front of one of the windows, surrounded by a group of guests, and, while he was discussing the desirability of a revision of the land-tax, he kept casting quick glances outside. In the bright light which the candles cast upon the fronts of the houses on the opposite side of the square, he had just caught sight of Madame Correur and Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq at one of the windows of the Hôtel de Paris. They were standing there, leaning and watching the ball, just as though they were in a box at a theatre. Every now and then there was a gleam of pleasure on their faces, and their bare throats rippled with laughter as some amusing incident attracted their notice.

The principal's wife had just been all round the great draw-

ing-room. She seemed somewhat disconsolate, and appeared quite regardless of the admiration excited by her sweeping train. She was evidently looking for some one, as she stepped smilingly and languidly along.

"Hasn't Monsieur le Commissaire come?" she at last asked of Du Poizat, who was inquiring after her husband's health. "I promised him a waltz."

"Oh, he's sure to come," the prefect replied. "I am surprised that he is not here already. He has had to go away on official business to day; but he told me that he would be back by six o'clock."

After the breakfast at the prefecture, about noon, Gilquin had set out from Niort on horseback to go and effect the arrest of the notary, Martineau. Coulonges was some twelve miles away. He calculated upon getting there at about two o'clock, and being able to get away again by four, or perhaps a little later, which would leave him plenty of time to get to the banquet, to which he had been invited. Consequently, he did not hurry his horse, but jogged along on his saddle, saying to himself that he would "make the running" in the evening at the ball with that pretty blonde, whose only fault in his eyes was that she was wanting in plumpness. Gilquin liked fleshy women. When he reached Coulonges, he dismounted at the Golden Lion, where a sergeant and two gendarmes ought to have been waiting for him. By arranging matters in this way, he had calculated that his arrival would not be noticed; and they could hire a carriage, he thought, and carry the notary away without any of his neighbours being any the wiser. The gendarmes, however, were not there. Gilquin waited for them till five o'clock, swearing, and drinking grog, and looking at his watch every quarter of an hour. He should never be able to get back to Niort in time for the banquet, he muttered. He was just having his horse saddled, when the sergeant at last made his appearance, followed by his two men. There had been some misunderstanding.

"Well, well, don't waste time in apologising!" cried the commissary, angrily. "We've got no time for that! It's already a quarter past five. Let us go and lay hold of our man as quickly as possible. We must be on our way back in another ten minutes."

Generally speaking, Gilquin was an amiable, good-natured man. He prided himself upon the perfectly urbane demeanour

which he showed in discharging his official duties. He had arranged an elaborate scheme for to-day's proceedings, which he hoped would as far as possible obviate any unpleasantness to Madame Correur's brother. It had been his intention to enter the house alone, while the gendarmes waited with the carriage near the garden-gate, in a little lane which looked on to the open country. But his three hours' waiting at the Golden Lion had so exasperated him that he had forgotten all about these carefully arranged precautions. He went through the village, and rang loudly at the street-door of the notary's house. One of the gendarmes was posted at this door, and the other was directed to go round and keep a watch upon the garden-wall. The sergeant remained with the commissary. Ten or a dozen scared villagers watched them from the distance.

The servant who opened the door was seized with a childish terror at the sight of the uniforms and she rushed away, crying out at the top of her voice :

“ Madame ! Madame ! Madame !”

A little plump woman, whose face maintained an expression of perfect calm, now came slowly down the stair-case.

“ Madame Martineau, I presume ? ” Gilquin said rapidly. “ I have a painful duty to perform, madame. I am come to arrest your husband.”

Madame Martineau clasped her short hands together, and her lips turned pale and began to quiver. But she uttered no cry, however. She remained standing upon the bottom step, blocking up the stair-case with her skirts. She asked Gilquin to show her his warrant, and required explanations, and did all she could to cause a delay.

“ Be careful ! He'll slip through our fingers if we don't mind,” the sergeant murmured into the commissary's ear.

Madame Martineau probably heard this remark, for she looked at the two men with her calm eyes, and said :

“ Come upstairs, gentlemen.”

She went up in front of them and took them into a room, in the middle of which Monsieur Martineau was standing in his dressing-gown. He had got up from his arm-chair, in which he spent most of his time, upon hearing the servant's cries of alarm. He was very tall, and his hands seemed quite dead ; his face was as pale as wax. His eyes, soft, black, determined eyes, were the only feature that appeared to still retain any life. Madame Martineau pointed to him with a silent gesture.

"I regret to say, sir," Gilquin began, "that I have a painful duty to perform."

When he had finished explaining his errand, the notary merely nodded his head and made no reply. A slight shiver shook the dressing-gown which covered his attenuated limbs.

"Very well, gentlemen, I am ready to follow you," he said, after a pause, with great politeness.

Then he began to walk about the room, putting in their places several articles, which were lying about on the different pieces of furniture, and he moved a parcel of books into another situation. Then he asked his wife for a clean shirt. The trembling which was affecting him became more violent. Madame Martineau, seeing him totter, followed him with outstretched arms, ready to catch him if he fell, just as one follows a little child.

"Come, sir, make haste!" said Gilquin.

The notary took another couple of turns about the room, and then he suddenly snatched at the air with his hands, and let himself drop into an arm-chair, contorted and stiffened with a paralytic seizure. His wife broke out into heavy silent tears.

Gilquin took out his watch.

"Confound it all!" he cried.

It was half-past five. He felt that he must now relinquish all hope of being back in Niort in time for the dinner at the prefecture. It would take at least another quarter of an hour to get this man into a carriage. He tried to console himself with the thought that at any rate he would not miss the ball, and just then he recollect ed that the principal's wife had promised to dance the first waltz with him.

"He's shamming," the sergeant whispered to Gilquin.
"Shall I lift him on to his feet?"

Without waiting for a reply, he stepped up to the notary and began to advise him not to attempt to deceive justice. Martineau was as rigid as a corpse, and his eyes were closed and his lips pinched. The sergeant began to lose his temper, and to indulge in strong language, and at last he laid his hand heavily upon the collar of the notary's dressing-gown. Madame Martineau, who had hitherto remained perfectly calm, now energetically pushed the sergeant away, and planted herself in front of her husband, clenching her fists with an air of devoted resolution.

"He's shamming, I tell you!" the sergeant repeated.

Gilquin shrugged his shoulders. He had made up his mind to carry off the notary either dead or alive.

“Send one of your men to get the carriage from the Golden Lion,” he said to the sergeant. “I have spoken to the landlord about it.”

When the sergeant had left the room, Gilquin stepped up to the window, and began to look complacently at the apricot trees that were blossoming in the garden. He was growing absorbed in his thoughts, when he felt a touch upon his shoulder. Madame Martineau was standing behind him. Her cheeks were quite dry, and she spoke in a calm steady voice.

“You mean this carriage for yourself, don’t you?” she asked. “But you can’t think of taking my husband to Niort, in his present state.”

“I have a painful duty to perform, madame”—Gilquin began for the third time.

“But it is a sin! You will kill him!” Madame Martineau interrupted. “You have not been ordered to kill him, have you?”

“I am acting under orders,” Gilquin replied in rougher tones than he had used previously, for he wished to curtail the supplications which he foresaw were coming.

A look of wild anger flashed across Madame Martineau’s plump face at this reply of Gilquin’s, and her eyes glanced round the room, as though she were trying to discover some possible means of saving her husband. But she quickly calmed herself by a strong effort, and resumed her previous firm and unexcited demeanour, as if she recognised the fact that tears could be of no possible service.

“God will punish you, sir,” she said quietly after a short pause, during which she had kept her eyes fixed upon Gilquin.

Then she turned away, and went, without a tear or supplication, to lean over the chair on which her husband lay dying. Gilquin had smiled at her.

Just at this moment the sergeant, who had gone in person to the Golden Lion, came back and said that the landlord asserted that he had not got a vehicle of any sort. The news of the arrest of the notary, who was extremely popular in the neighbourhood, must have got abroad, so Gilquin and the sergeant thought, and the landlord was concealing his carriages; for two hours ago, when the commissary had questioned him upon the subject, he had promised to let him have an old phaeton which he let out for drives in the neighbourhood.

"Go and search the inn!" cried Gilquin, enraged at this fresh obstacle. "Go and search every house in the village! Do they think they are going to laugh at us? Lose no time! I have an engagement to keep, and I have no time to spare. I give you a quarter of an hour."

The sergeant went off again, taking his men with him; and they each went in different directions. Three quarters of an hour passed away, and then another quarter, and then another. At the end of an hour and a half one of the gendarmes returned with a very long face. All his searching had been quite futile. Gilquin grew feverishly excited, and kept rushing about and looking out of the window at the waning light. The ball would certainly be opened without his being there, he said to himself, and the principal's wife would consider him guilty of great discourtesy, which would entirely ruin all his chances with her. Every time that he went past the notary's chair, he felt choking with anger. Never before had any criminal caused him so much trouble. The notary lay perfectly motionless in his chair, becoming ever paler and colder.

It was past seven o'clock when the sergeant returned with a beaming countenance. He had at last succeeded in discovering the landlord's old phaeton, concealed in a shed half a mile away from the village. The horse was harnessed and between the shafts, and it was the animal's snorting which had enabled him to discover it. But when the phaeton was at the door, it was necessary to dress Monsieur Martineau. This operation took a very long time. Madame Martineau very slowly and deliberately put him on some white stockings and a clean white shirt. Then she dressed him altogether in black; black trousers, frock-coat and waistcoat. She would not allow the gendarmes to render her the slightest assistance. The notary lay perfectly quiet in his wife's arms. A lamp had been lighted, and Gilquin was beating his hands together impatiently, while the sergeant stood perfectly still, his three-cornered hat casting a huge shadow upon the ceiling.

"Come, haven't you done now?" Gilquin cried.

For the last five minutes Madame Martineau had been searching in a drawer. At last she produced a pair of black gloves which she put into her husband's pocket.

"I hope, sir," she said, "that you will allow me to come into the carriage. I should like to go with my husband."

"That is impossible," replied Gilquin, roughly.

Madame Martineau accepted the refusal and did not press her request.

"At any rate," she said, "you will allow me to follow him?"

"The roads are free to every one," the commissary answered; "but you won't be able to get a vehicle, as there don't appear to be any in the neighbourhood."

Madame Martineau shrugged her shoulders slightly and went out of the room to give an order. Ten minutes afterwards a gig drew up in front of the door, behind the phaeton. It was now necessary to get Monsieur Martineau downstairs. The two gendarmes carried him, while his wife supported his head. Whenever the dying man uttered the slightest groan, Madame Martineau imperiously commanded the gendarmes to stop, which they did, notwithstanding the angry glances of the commissary. They halted in this way for a moment or two at every step. The notary looked like a corpse in their arms, and he was quite unconscious when they seated him in the carriage.

"Half past eight!" cried Gilquin, looking at his watch again. "Confound it all! I shall never get there in time!"

There was no doubt about that. He would be fortunate if he arrived before the ball was half over. He sprang on to his horse with an oath and ordered the coachman to drive as fast as he could. The phaeton led the way, the gendarmes riding at each side of it; then, a little way behind, followed the commissary and the sergeant, and last of all came the gig with Madame Martineau. The night air was very sharp. The procession passed over the long grey road through the midst of the sleeping country, accompanied by the rumbling of the rolling wheels and the monotonous footfalls of the horses. Not a word was spoken during the journey. Gilquin was thinking over what he should say when he met the principal's wife. Every now and then Madame Martineau sprang on to her feet in the gig, fancying she could hear the sound of a death-rattle, but she could scarcely distinguish the form of the phaeton as it rolled on through the black night.

It was half-past ten when they reached Niort. The commissary, to avoid passing through the town, directed the men to go round by the ramparts. When they reached the gaol, they had to ring loudly. As soon as the gatekeeper saw the prisoner they were bringing him, looking so white and cold, he went off to awaken the governor. The latter, who was not very well, soon made his appearance in his slippers. When he

saw Martineau, he appeared quite cross, and absolutely refused to receive a man in such a condition. "Did they take the gaol for an hospital?" he asked them.

"The man has been arrested, and what do you expect us to do with him?" cried Gilquin, quite losing his temper at this fresh impediment.

"Whatever you like, monsieur le commissaire, except bring him here," replied the governor. "I tell you again that I will not receive him. I won't take such a responsibility upon myself."

Madame Martineau had taken advantage of this discussion to get into the phaeton with her husband. She now proposed that he should be taken to the hotel.

"Very well, to the hotel or the devil or wherever you like!" cried Gilquin. "I've had quite enough of him! Take him along!"

He conformed himself sufficiently to his duty, however, to go with the notary to the Hôtel de Paris, which Madame Martineau herself had fixed upon. The Place de la Préfecture was now becoming empty, and only the children were left playing about on the footway. The townsfolk were slowly disappearing into the darkness of the neighbouring streets. The bright glow from the six windows, however, still made the square almost as light as day. The band was playing merrily, and the ladies' bare shoulders and Parisian head-dresses could be seen through the open curtains, circling round the room. As they carried the notary up to the first floor, Gilquin raised his head and caught sight of Madame Correur and Mademoiselle Bille-coq, who were still standing at the window and gazing out at the festivities. The elder lady, however, had noticed her brother, and, leaning out so far as to risk falling, she made an energetic sign to Gilquin to come upstairs.

Towards midnight the ball at the prefecture was at its zenith. The doors of the dining-room, where a cold supper had been laid, had just been thrown open. The ladies, with hotly flushed faces, were fanning themselves as they stood up and ate, with a deal of gay laughter. Others were still dancing, unwilling to lose a single quadrille, and contenting themselves with the glasses of wine which the gentlemen brought to them. The room seemed filled with a hazy glitter of women's hair and skirts and gold-braceleted arms. The gold and the music and the heat were growing oppressive, and Rougon, half suffocated,

was glad to escape from the room on a whispered summons from Du Poizat.

Madame Correur and Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq were waiting for him in the small adjoining room where he had seen them on the previous evening. They were both crying bitterly.

“My poor brother ! my poor Martineau !” sobbed Madame Correur, stifling her tears in her handkerchief. “Ah ! I felt sure you could do nothing for him. Oh, why couldn’t you have saved him ?”

Rougon was going to say something, but she would not give him time.

“He has been arrested to-day,” she continued. “I have just seen him. Oh dear ! oh dear !”

“Don’t distress yourself,” said Rougon, at last. “The matter shall be looked into, and I hope that we shall be able to obtain his release.”

Madame Correur ceased dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief. She looked at Rougon and exclaimed in her natural voice :

“But he is dead !”

Then she immediately relapsed into a disconsolate tone and again buried her face in her handkerchief.

“Oh dear ! Oh dear ! my poor, poor Martineau !”

Dead ! A sudden tremor thrilled through Rougon’s body. He could not find a word to say. For the first time he was conscious of a pit before him, a dark gloomy pit into which he was being gradually driven. To think that the man was really dead ! He had never intended anything of that kind to happen. Things had gone too far.

“Alas ! yes, the poor dear man is dead,” said Mademoiselle Herminie Billecoq, with a deep, long-drawn sigh. “It seems that they refused to receive him at the gaol. Then, when we saw him arriving at the hotel in such a pitiable condition, madame went down and insisted upon being admitted to him, saying that she was his sister. A sister may surely claim—may she not ?—to receive her brother’s last breath. That is what I said to that hussy of a Madame Martineau, who threatened to turn us out of the room. But we forced her to let us remain by the bedside. It was very soon all over. The death agony only lasted for an hour. The poor man was laid on the bed in his black clothes. Anyone would have thought that he was a notary just going to a marriage. He died out just

like a candle-flame, with a little twist of his face. He couldn't have had much pain."

"And then—would you believe it?—Madame Martineau actually tried to pick a quarrel with me," cried Madame Correur. "I don't know what she was driving at, but she spoke about my brother's property, and accused me of having given him the last stroke. I said to her, 'If I had been there, madame, I would never have allowed him to be taken away, I would have let the gendarmes hew me in pieces sooner!' And they *should* have hewn me in pieces sooner! I told you so, didn't I, Herminie?"

"Yes, yes, indeed," said the tall girl.

"Well, I know my tears won't bring him to life again," continued Madame Correur; "but I'm crying because I can't help it. Oh, my poor Martineau!"

Rougon felt very ill at ease. He drew away his hands which Madame Correur had grasped within her own. He could not think of anything to say, but felt shocked by the story of this death which seemed abominable to him.

"Look!" exclaimed Herminie, standing in front of the window, "you can see the room from here in this bright light. It is the third window to the left on the first floor. There is a light behind the curtains."

Then Rougon said good-night to them, while Madame Correur apologised for troubling him, and called him her friend and said that her first impulse had been to come and tell him the fatal news.

"It is a very annoying business," Rougon whispered into Du Poizat's ear, when he went back, with his face still quite pale, into the ballroom.

"It is all that imbecile of a Gilquin's doing!" said the prefect, shrugging his shoulders.

The ball was still going on merrily. In the dining-room, of which a portion could be seen through the widely opened door, the deputy-mayor was cramming the three daughters of the conservator of rivers and forests with sweetmeats; while the colonel of the seventy-eighth was drinking punch and listening attentively to the cutting remarks of the chief surveyor of bridges and highways, who was munching sugared-almonds. Monsieur Kahn, near the door, was repeating to the president of the Civil Tribunal in loud tones the speech which he had made in the afternoon on the advantages of the new line; and

round them stood a group of grave-faced men, the receiver of taxes, the two magistrates, and the delegates from the consultative chamber of agriculture and the statistical society, who stood round with gaping mouths. In the ballroom, in the glow of the chandeliers, the dancers were rising and falling in the gentle swell of a waltz, accompanied by the music of the band, in which every now and then the blare of a trumpet sounded out. The son of the receiver general was dancing with the mayor's sister, one of the public prosecutor's assessors with a girl in blue, and the other with a girl in pink. There was one couple which excited especial admiration, the commissary of police and the principal's wife, as they slowly revolved together in a close embrace. Gilquin had hurried off to dress himself irreproachably in his black coat and varnished boots and white gloves, and the beautiful blonde had forgiven him for his lateness, and was now lying languidly against his shoulder, with her eyes steeped in tenderness. Gilquin was throwing his chest forward, and bringing the motion of his hips into strong prominence, a vulgarism, the fine taste of which seemed to delight the spectators. As they revolved round the room they all but came into collision with Rougon, who was obliged to retreat close to the wall to let them float past him in a whirling cloud of gold-spangled tarlatan.

CHAPTER XI.

ROUGON had succeeded in obtaining the portfolio of Agriculture and Commerce for Delestang. One morning, early in May, he went to the Rue du Colisée to take up his new colleague. There was to be a meeting of the ministers at Saint Cloud, where the court had just gone to reside.

“What! are you going too?” he exclaimed in surprise, as he saw Clorinde taking her place in the landau that was standing in front of the door.

“Yes,” she answered, with a laugh; “yes, I’m going to the council, too.”

Then, when she had arranged her voluminous pale cherry-coloured skirts, she added, more seriously:

“I have an appointment with the Empress. I am the treasurer of a society for assisting young work-girls in which she takes an interest.”

The two men now took their places. Delestang sat down by his wife’s side. He had with him a morocco portfolio, which he kept upon his knees. Rougon was opposite Clorinde, and his hands were quite empty. It was nearly half past nine, and the council was fixed for ten. The coachman was ordered to drive as quickly as he could. In order to cut the distance as short as possible, he went along the Rue Marbeuf, and through the Chaillot district, where the work of demolition had already commenced. They passed by deserted streets fringed with gardens and wooden shanties, steep passages that turned and twisted and came back to where they started, and narrow bits of ground planted with sickly-looking trees. It was a strange mongrel corner of the city, a confusion of villas and stalls, which lay sunning itself on the warm slope that bright morning.

“How hideous it is here!” said Clorinde, as she lay back in the landau.

She turned herself half round, and looked at her husband for a moment or two, with a serious expression, and then, as

though she could not help it, she began to smile. Delestang, with his frock-coat neatly buttoned round him, was sitting primly on his seat, his body leaning neither too much forward, nor too much backward. His handsome, thoughtful face, and his premature baldness, which gave an appearance of great height to his brow, attracted the attention of passers-by. Clorinde noticed that no one looked at Rougon, whose heavy face seemed to be asleep. Presently, in a sort of maternal manner, she pulled her husband's left wristband forward a little, as it had slipped back inside his sleeve.

"What were you doing last night?" she now asked of the great man, as she saw him yawning behind his fingers.

"I was working very late," he said. "There are a lot of tiresome things bothering me."

Then there was another pause. Clorinde now began to look at Rougon. He yielded himself unresistingly to the slight joltings of the carriage. His frock-coat was strained out of shape by his heavy shoulders, and his badly brushed hat bore the marks of old rain stains. Clorinde called to mind a jobber, from whom she had bought a horse a month previously, and who was very like him. A smile, with which was mingled a touch of contempt, began to play about her lips.

"Well?" said Rougon, at last, beginning to feel impatient under Clorinde's prolonged examination of him.

"Well," she replied, "I'm looking at you. It isn't forbidden to do so, is it? You're not afraid that I shall eat you, are you?"

She uttered this last sentence with a provoking air, and let her white teeth appear between her lips. Rougon, however, began to joke.

"I'm too big for that," he said; "you would never be able to get me down."

"Oh, I don't know that, if I were very hungry," she replied gravely, after, to all appearance, thinking over the state of her appetite.

The landau had now reached the Porte de la Muette. Here, after emerging from the narrow streets of the Chaillot district, they suddenly came into more open ground, and caught a glimpse of the tender verdure of the Bois. It was a lovely morning, and the distant turf gleamed fresh and soft, while the young leaves on the trees rustled gently in the warm air. They left the deer-park on their right, and took the road

that led to Saint Cloud. The landau now rolled through the gravelled avenue, quite free from all jolting motion, and went as lightly and softly as a sledge gliding over the snow.

"How nasty those streets were!" said Clorinde, as she lolled back. "Well, we can breathe here, and talk. Have you any news of our friend Du Poizat?"

"Yes, he's very well," Rougon replied.

"And does he still like his department?"

Rougon made a vague gesture as though he did not want to make any definite reply. The young woman was aware that the prefect of Deux-Sèvres was beginning to be a source of no little trouble to him, on account of the severity of his administration, so she did not press her question, but began to talk about Monsieur Kahn, and Madame Correur. Finally she asked Rougon to tell her about what had happened during his visit to Niort, with a touch of mischievous curiosity.

"By the way," she exclaimed, suddenly interrupting herself, "I met Colonel Jobelin and his cousin Monsieur Bouchard yesterday. We talked about you. Yes, we talked about you."

Rougon still kept silence, and merely gave his shoulders a twist. Then Clorinde began to speak of the past.

"Do you remember our pleasant little evenings in the Rue Marbeuf?" she asked. "Now you are so busy that we can't come to you any longer. Your friends are complaining about it. They say that you are forgetting them; I'm always quite frank with you, you know, and conceal nothing. They think you are deserting them."

Just at this moment, as the carriage had passed between the two lakes, they met a brougham on its way back to Paris, and they caught a glimpse of a sulky-looking face hastily retreating back into the brougham, apparently with the intention of avoiding the necessity of bowing.

"Why, it's your brother-in-law!" exclaimed Clorinde.

"Yes, he's not very well," Rougon replied with a smile. "His doctor has ordered him to take morning drives."

Then he suddenly threw off his reserve, and he began to talk freely as the landau made its way along the gently curving avenue beneath the tall trees.

"What do they expect of me, I wonder? I can't give them the moon if they cry for it! Beulin-d'Orchère, now, wanted to be Minister of Justice. I have tried to effect the impossible, and I have sounded the Emperor on the subject; but I

can't get anything out of him. The Emperor, I believe, is afraid of him. It isn't my fault, is it ? Beulin-d'Orchère is first president. That really ought to satisfy him for the present. And yet, you see, he actually avoids bowing to me. He is an idiot ! ”

Clorinde had let her glance drop, and her fingers were playing with the tassel of her sun-shade. She let Rougon talk on freely, and made no attempt to interpose a word.

“ The others are almost as unreasonable. If it is true that the colonel and Bouchard complain of me, they are quite wrong to do so, for I have already done a great deal for them. I say a word for my friends whenever I can. I've got a dozen or so pretty mill-stones about my neck ! Till they've got the very skin off my body they won't be satisfied ! ”

He paused for a moment, and then he resumed with a good-natured laugh :

“ Well, well, - if it were really necessary for them to have something more, I would give it to them. When you've once opened your hands it is impossible to shut them again. In spite of all the unkind things my friends say of me, I spend my time in asking favours of all sorts for them.”

Then he touched Clorinde's knee to force her to look at him.

“ Well, now, about yourself ! I am going to talk to the Emperor this morning. Is there anything that I can ask for on your behalf ? ”

“ No, thank you,” Clorinde answered in a dry voice.

As he still persisted in his offers, she grew a little vexed, and accused him of reproaching herself and her husband with the services he had already rendered them. They would not trouble him to do anything further for them, she said.

“ I manage my affairs for myself now,” she remarked in conclusion. “ I'm quite big enough now to get on by myself, you see.”

The carriage had just emerged from the Bois. It was passing through Boulogne quite amid the clatter of several heavy carts, which were jolting along the High Street. Delestang had been sitting silently ever since they started, keeping his hands upon his morocco portfolio. Now, at last, he bent forward and cried out to Rougon in the midst of the noise :

“ Do you think that his Majesty will keep us to breakfast ? ”

Rougon made a gesture expressive of doubt. Then he said :

"Breakfast is generally served at the palace when the council is a long one."

Delestang again fell back into his corner, and once more appeared to be absorbed in deep reverie. Presently he bent forward again.

"Will there be much business before the council this morning?" he asked.

"Yes, I daresay," Rougon answered. "But one can never tell beforehand. Several of our colleagues, I fancy, are going to present reports on certain important matters. I, at any-rate, am going to raise the question of that book about which I and the colportage committee are in dispute."

"What book is that?" Clorinde asked with animation.

"It is an idiotic publication; one of those volumes which are got up for circulation amongst the peasantry. It is called 'Friend Jacques's Evening Chats.' It is a mixture of socialism, witchcraft, and agriculture; and there is a chapter in it dwelling upon the advantages of forming leagues. Oh, it is a very dangerous book!"

The young woman, whose curiosity did not seem to be quite satisfied, turned and looked at her husband.

"You are too severe, Rougon," said Delestang. "I have glanced through the book, and I have found a good deal of valuable matter in it. The chapter on the advantages accruing from associating labour and labour is very good, I think. I shall be surprised if the Emperor condemns the tone of it."

Rougon was about to reply hotly, and he opened out his arms with a gesture of protestation. But he suddenly restrained himself, as though he did not want to discuss the matter any further. He said nothing more, but began to look at the country through which they were passing. The landau was now crossing the bridge of Saint Cloud. Down below them the pale blue river was flowing sleepily, shimmering in the sunshine, and the rows of trees along the banks were plainly reflected in the water. The far-spreading sky stretched over them, almost quite white in the soft spring morning, and scarcely flecked with a single touch of blue.

When the carriage stopped in the courtyard of the château, Rougon got out the first and then offered his hand to Clorinde. The young woman did not avail herself of the proffered support, however, but sprang lightly to the ground. Then

seeing that Rougon was still holding out his arm for her acceptance, she tapped his fingers gently with her parasol.

" Didn't I tell you that I was big enough to manage by myself, now ? "

She seemed to have lost all her old respect for her master's huge fists, and she no longer showed that disciple-like submission for him which she had assumed when she had wished to drain away a little of his strength. To-day she fancied she had weakened his arms sufficiently for her purpose, and she no longer cared to affect her former wheedling, docile humility. She herself, in her turn, had shot up into a position of influence, and was becoming a power. When Delestang got out of the carriage, she allowed Rougon to go on before them. Then she whispered into her husband's ear :

" I hope you won't try to prevent him making a fuss about his ' Friend Jacques.' It will give you a good opportunity of not always appearing to say exactly what he does."

In the entrance-hall, before leaving Delestang, Clorinde cast a careful glance at him, and was somewhat distressed at seeing one of the buttons of his coat hanging a little loosely. Then, as an usher went to inform the Empress of her arrival, she stood and smilingly watched Rougon and her husband take themselves off.

The ministerial council was held in a room near the Emperor's private study. In the centre of it stood a large table covered with a cloth and surrounded by a dozen arm-chairs. The windows, which were tall and admitted a bright light, looked on to the terrace of the château. When Rougon and Delestang entered the room, they found all their colleagues already assembled there, with the exception of the Minister for Public Works and the Naval and Colonial Minister, who were on leave of absence. The Emperor had not yet made his appearance. For the next ten minutes the ministers chatted together, standing by the windows and about the table. There were two of the number with scowling faces, who so cordially detested each other that they never exchanged a word, but all the rest were talking pleasantly and easily together till more serious matters should demand their attention. Paris was at this time much interested in an embassy which had come from the extreme east, and the members of which wore extraordinary costumes, and indulged in the most eccentric modes of salutation. The Minister for Foreign Affairs was telling

to his colleagues about a visit which he had paid to the chief of this embassy on the previous evening. He had been very much amused at what he had seen, he said, but he had succeeded in preserving a perfectly grave demeanour. The conversation then turned upon more frivolous matters, and the Minister of State furnished some fresh details as to the real condition of a ballet girl at the opera who had narrowly escaped breaking her leg. In the midst of all their apparent unrestraint, however, the ministers showed a certain watchfulness and distrust, carefully framing certain of their sentences, recalling some half-uttered words, keeping a watchful look-out through their smiles and suddenly becoming serious again as soon as they saw that they were being watched.

"Then it was a mere sprain?" said Delestang who took a great interest in the ladies of the ballet.

"Yes, nothing but a sprain," replied the minister. "The poor girl will have to keep her room for a fortnight, but she'll be all right again by then. She feels very much ashamed of herself for having fallen."

A slight sound now caused the ministers to turn their heads, and they all bowed. The Emperor had just entered the room. He stood for a moment leaning upon the back of his chair. Then in his low deliberate voice he asked:

"Is she better?"

"Much better, sire," replied the minister, bowing again. "I heard about her this morning."

At a sign from the Emperor, the members of the council now took their seats round the table. There were nine of them. Some of them spread out papers, while the others lay back in their chairs and began to examine their nails. There was silence for a while. The Emperor seemed to be unwell. There was a dull expression about his face, and he was slowly twisting the ends of his long moustache. Then, as no one spoke, he appeared to recollect himself.

"Gentlemen," he remarked, "the session of the Corps Législatif is about to end—"

The budget was the first subject which engaged the attention of the council. The Minister of Finance mentioned the votes for which the government had asked. For the first time the chamber had indulged in criticism. The parliamentary committee had asked that the sinking fund might be properly provided for, and wished the government to content itself with

the supplies now voted without coming forward with supplementary estimates. Moreover, the members of the chamber had complained of the slight weight which was attached to their expressions of opinion by the Council of State, and one of them had even gone so far as to claim for the Corps Législatif the right to prepare the budget.

"In my opinion," said the Finance Minister, concluding his remarks, "there is no ground whatever for such claims. The government keeps the greatest economy in view in preparing its budgets, and I may say that we have put ourselves to the greatest inconvenience to effect a saving of a miserable two millions of francs. Still I think that it would perhaps be advisable to postpone the application for three supplementary votes of credit which we contemplated making. A transfer of funds will provide us with the necessary money, and matters can be put straight later on."

The Emperor nodded his head in assent. It did not seem as though he were listening to what was being said. There was a blank listless look about his eyes, as he sat gazing, like a blind man, at the bright light which was streaming through the middle window in front of him. There was now another interval of silence. All the ministers expressed their approval like the Emperor. For the next moment or two only a slight rustling broke the silence. The Minister of Justice was turning over the pages of some manuscript. Then he consulted his colleagues with a glance.

"Sire," he began at length, "I have brought with me the draft of a memorandum relating to the creation of a new nobility. It consists merely of rough notes, which I thought it would be advisable to put before the council before proceeding any further in the matter, in order that I may profit by any hint—"

"Yes, yes ; read it," the Emperor interrupted. "You are quite right."

Then he turned half round to look at the minister as the latter read the memorandum. He seemed much more animated now, and there was a yellow light flashing in his grey eyes.

The court was at that time extremely interested in this scheme for a new nobility. The government had begun by submitting to the Corps Législatif a bill which punished with fine and imprisonment anyone who assumed any title of nobility whatsoever without being entitled to do so. It was a question of giving official sanction to the old titles, and of

preparing the way for the creation of new ones. However, this bill had given rise to a heated discussion in the chamber. Some of the deputies, enthusiastically devoted to the empire, had protested that a nobility could not exist in a democratic state ; and, when a division was taken, twenty-three votes had been given against the bill. The Emperor, however, still adhered to his idea ; and he himself had suggested a very comprehensive scheme to the Minister of Justice.

The memorandum commenced by some historical references. Then the projected scheme was detailed at length. Titles were to be conferred for different kinds of public service, so as to make the new honours accessible to every citizen, a democratic arrangement which seemed to arouse the minister's great enthusiasm. Then a draft of the projected decree was set out. When the minister came to the second clause of this decree, he raised his voice and read it very deliberately.

“ The title of count shall be conferred upon the following persons after five years' service in their respective functions or dignities, or after they have had the grand cross of the legion of honour conferred upon them by us : namely, our ministers and the members of our Privy Council, the cardinals, marshals, admirals, senators, and ambassadors and such of the generals of division as shall have held a chief command.”

The minister stopped for a moment and cast a questioning look at the Emperor as if asking if he had omitted anyone. His Majesty reflected, with his head slightly over his left shoulder.

“ I think we must include the presidents of the Corps Législatif and the Council of State,” he said, after a pause.

The Minister of Justice nodded his head in approbation, and hastily made a note on the margin of his manuscript. Just as he was about to begin reading again, he was interrupted by the Minister for Public Education and Worship who wanted to call attention to an omission.

“ The archbishops—” he began.

“ Excuse me,” interrupted the Minister of Justice drily, “ the archbishops are to be merely barons. Let me read the whole of the decree.”

His papers, however, had got mixed and he spent some time looking for the next page. Rougon, with his square sturdy figure his thick neck and clumsy bucolic shoulders, was smiling out of the corners of his lips ; and, as he turned round, he caught sight of his neighbour, the Minister of State, the last

representative of an old Norman family, indulging in a similar smile of quiet contempt. A significant glance passed between them. The parvenu and the scion of an ancient stock were both of the same way of thinking.

"Ah, here it is!" exclaimed the Minister of Justice at last. "Clause III. The title of baron shall be conferred, firstly, upon such members of the Corps Législatif as shall have been honoured three times with the confidence of their fellow-citizens; secondly, upon the members of the Council of State of eight years' standing; thirdly, upon the first president and public prosecutor of the Supreme Court, upon the first president and public prosecutor of the Exchequer Court, upon the generals of divisions and vice-admirals, upon the archbishops and ministers plenipotentiaries, after five years' service in their respective offices, or if they have attained the rank of commander in the Legion of Honour—"

And so the minister read on. The first presidents and public prosecutors of the Imperial courts, the generals of brigades and rear-admirals, the bishops, and even the mayors of the chief cities of first-class prefectures were to be made barons, but on condition that they had served in their respective offices for ten years.

"Everybody is going to be a baron, then," Rougon murmured, in a low voice.

Some of his colleagues, who affected to consider him a very ill-bred man, assumed grave expressions to make him understand that they thought such a remark in very bad taste. The Emperor did not seem to have heard him.

"Well, gentlemen, what do you think of the scheme?" his Majesty asked, when the Chancellor had finished reading.

They all hesitated about saying anything, and waited for a more direct question.

"Monsieur Rougon," the Emperor resumed, "what is your opinion of the scheme?"

"Well, sire," replied the Minister of the Interior, with his quiet smile, "I cannot say that I think very favourably of it. It is exposed to the greatest of all dangers, that is to say, to ridicule. I am afraid that all those barons will merely succeed in raising a laugh at their expense. I say nothing about more serious matters, such as the sentiment of equality which is so much in the ascendant at the present time, or of the vanity which such a system would tend to develop—"

But when he had got thus far he was interrupted by the Minister of Justice who seemed greatly vexed and offended, and began to defend himself as though a personal attack had been made upon him. He said that he was a middle-class man himself, and the son of a middle-class father, and that he was quite incapable of attempting to do anything to impair the principles of equality held at the present time. The new nobility was going to be a "democratic nobility," and this phrase "democratic nobility" seemed to convey his idea so perfectly that he repeated it several times over. Then Rougon said a few words in reply, still preserving his smiling unruffled demeanour. Whereupon the Minister of Justice, who was a little dry dark man, indulged in somewhat offensive personalities. The Emperor held himself aloof from the dispute, and his eyes were again centred upon the light streaming through the window in front of him. However, when the angry voices at last grew so loud as to interfere with his dignified repose, he murmured :

" Gentlemen, gentlemen."

Then after a pause, he continued :

" Monsieur Rougon is perhaps right. The scheme is not quite ripe yet. We shall have to consider if it cannot be put upon another basis. We can consider that later on."

Then the council took some minor matters into consideration. The newspaper *Le Siècle* became the subject of a deal of talk, for it had just published an article which had given great offence at court. A week never passed without the Emperor being besought by those about him to suppress this journal, which was the only republican organ still extant. His Majesty, however, was personally inclined to be very indulgent towards the press, and he often amused himself, in the secrecy of his own study, in writing long articles in reply to the attacks which were made upon his government. He had an unavowed dream of having a newspaper of his own, in which he could publish manifestoes and engage in polemical discussions. However, His Majesty determined to-day that a warning should be addressed to the *Siècle*.

Their excellencies now thought that the council was over, as was evident from the manner in which they were sitting, just upon the edges of their chairs. The Minister for War, a general who looked very much bored, and who had not spoken a word during the whole of the sitting, had already taken his gloves

from his pocket, when Rougon brought his elbows energetically down upon the table.

“Sire,” he said, “I desire to call the council’s attention to a disagreement between the colportage committee and myself relative to a book which has been presented for authorisation.”

The other ministers now ensconced themselves in their chairs again. The Emperor turned towards Rougon and authorised him to continue by a slight nod of his head.

Rougon then entered into details. His smile and his good-natured expression had quite vanished. He leant over the edge of the table, and, as he swept the cloth with a regular mechanical movement of his right hand, he stated that he had determined to preside in person at one of the recent meetings of the committee in order to stimulate the zeal of its members.

“I pointed out to them the views of the government as to the improvements it was desirable for them to effect in the important branch of the public service to which they belong. The colportage system, I told them, would be a source of grave danger if it were allowed to become a weapon in the hands of the revolutionists, to prove a means of stirring up discussions and ill-will. So it is the duty of the committee, I said, to reject all publications which foment afresh the passions which have ceased to trouble us. It must gladly sanction, on the other hand, those healthy works which teach the worship of God, the love of one’s country, and gratitude to one’s Sovereign.”

The rest of the ministers, although they felt very cross and surly, felt constrained to bow approvingly on hearing this last sentence.

“The number of pernicious books increases every day,” Rougon continued. “They form a rising flood against which we cannot take too energetic steps for protecting our country. Out of every dozen books that are published, eleven and a half are only fit to be thrown into the fire. That is the average. Never before have wicked sentiments, subversive theories, and anti-social monstrosities found so many exponents. I am occasionally compelled to read certain publications; well, I tell you—”

The Minister for Public Education here ventured an interruption.

“Novels—” he began

“I never read novels,” declared Rougon drily.

His colleague made a gesture expressive of wounded virtue, and rolled his eyes in a shocked sort of way as though he also repudiated all reading of novels.

"What I wanted to remark was merely this," he continued. "Novels are an especially poisonous food offered to the unhealthy curiosity of the people."

"Doubtless," replied the Minister of the Interior; "but there are other works quite as dangerous. I am speaking of those popularly written treatises which are the means of disseminating through the homes of the peasantry and the working-classes a heap of false social and economic science, the effect of which is to seriously disturb weak brains. A work of the kind to which I am alluding, 'Friend Jacques's Evening Chats,' has just been submitted to the committee for consideration. It is the story of a sergeant who comes back to his native village and holds discussions with the school-master every Sunday evening in the presence of a score of farm-labourers. Each discussion is upon a different subject, such as the new systems of agriculture, trades unions, and the great part which the producer plays in society. I have read this book, to which one of the clerks called my attention, and it seems to me to be all the more dangerous inasmuch as it veils its miserable theories beneath a pretended admiration for the imperial institutions. No one can be deceived by it, however; it is clearly the production of a demagogue. I was consequently extremely surprised when I heard some of the members of the committee speaking of it in eulogistic terms. I have discussed certain passages of it with them, but apparently without having convinced them. The author, they have assured me, has even shown his respect for Your Majesty by sending you a copy of the book. On this account then, sire, I have thought it right, before taking any active steps, to ask for your opinion and that of the council."

He looked at the Emperor, whose wandering eyes had at last settled upon a paper-knife which was lying on the table in front of him. His Majesty took up the knife and began to twist it about in his fingers.

"Yes, yes," he murmured; "Friend Jacques's Evening Chats—"

Then, interrupting himself, he glanced obliquely to the right and left of the table.

"You have perhaps seen the book, gentlemen. I should be very glad to know—"

Then he stopped again. The ministers addressed furtive questioning glances to each other, and each hoped that his neighbour would speak and express an opinion. The silence, however, continued unbroken, and there was an increasing feeling of uneasy constraint. It was quite clear that there was not one of them who even knew of the existence of the book. At last the Minister for War took it upon himself to convey by a gesture which comprehended all his colleagues their general ignorance of the publication in question.

The Emperor was twisting his moustaches.

“ Well, Monsieur Delestang, have you anything to say ? ” he asked after a pause.

Delestang was sitting restlessly in his chair, as though he were a prey to some inward struggle. This direct question seemed to decide him. Before speaking, however, he glanced involuntarily towards Rougon.

“ I have had the book in my hands, sire,” he said.

He checked himself, feeling Rougon’s great grey eyes fixed upon him ; but then, to the Emperor’s visible satisfaction, he began to speak again, though his lips could be seen quivering slightly.

“ I regret that I find myself in disagreement with my friend and colleague the Minister of the Interior. The publication in question might with advantage possibly be less sweeping in its language and insist more than it does upon that prudent deliberation with which all really useful progress must be accomplished. Still, the ‘ Friend Jacques’s Evening Chats ’ seems to me to be a book which has been conceived with the most excellent intentions. The hopes which are expressed in it for the future evince no hostility to the imperial institutions. On the contrary, indeed, they are what the legitimate expansion of our institutions lead us to expect.”

He paused again. Notwithstanding the care which he had taken to turn himself towards the Emperor, he could not shake off the consciousness of Rougon sitting on the other side of the table, leaning on his elbows and looking at him with a face pale with surprise. Generally speaking, Delestang’s views were identical with those of the great man. The latter consequently had a momentary hope that a word from him might bring back his erring disciple.

“ Well, now,” he exclaimed with a frown, “ I’ll just give you an example. I’m sorry I haven’t brought the book with me,

but I can give you the substance of a chapter which I remember very well. Jacques is speaking of two beggars who go soliciting alms through the village, from door to door, and, in reply to a question from the school-master, he asserts that he will show the peasants a way by which they will never have a single poor person amongst them. Then there follows a very elaborate system for the extinction of pauperism. It contains the whole communistic theory. Surely his excellency the Minister for Agriculture and Commerce cannot approve of that chapter."

Delestang summoned up all his courage and looked Rougon boldly in the face.

"You are going too far in saying the whole communistic theory," he said. "It merely struck me as being an ingenious exposition of the principles of combination."

He had been searching in his portfolio as he spoke.

"I have got the book here," he added.

Then he began to read the chapter under discussion. He read it in a low monotonous voice, and his wise-looking face assumed an expression of extraordinary gravity at certain passages. The Emperor listened with an air of deep attention. He seemed to particularly appreciate the more touching portions, in which the author had made his peasants speak in a strain of childish innocence. The ministers seemed quite delighted by what was happening, and at seeing Rougon abandoned by Delestang, whom he had brought into the ministry simply that he might have some one on whom he could count in the midst of the unexpressed hostility of his other colleagues. The latter constantly felt indignant with him for his constant arrogation of power and craving for authority, his habit of treating them as though they were merely so many clerks, while he himself assumed the position of His Majesty's private adviser and right hand man. Now he was finding himself completely isolated! This Delestang, they thought, was certainly a man to be well received.

"There are perhaps one or two words—" said the Emperor, when Delestang had finished reading; "but, really, taking it altogether, I don't see anything—eh, gentlemen?"

"It is perfectly innocent," chorused the ministers.

Rougon made no reply for a moment, but merely shrugged his shoulders. Then he returned to the charge, singling out Delestang for his attack. For several minutes a contest went

on between them in short concise sentences. Delestang was growing bitter, and began to indulge in cutting remarks, whereupon Rougon gradually wound himself up. He for the first time felt his authority giving way beneath him. Then suddenly springing on to his feet, he addressed himself to the Emperor with a vehement gesture.

“Sire,” he said, “I consider it a great misfortune that this book is to be authorised, since your Majesty in your wisdom declares that you can see no danger in it. But I must warn you, sire, that it would be a source of the greatest danger to France to confer one half of the liberties which are claimed by this ‘Friend Jacques.’ You summoned me to power under the gravest circumstances. You told me that I was not to attempt, by any untimely moderation, to try to reassure those who were quaking with alarm. In accordance with your express commands, sire, I have made myself feared. I believe that I have obeyed your slightest instructions and have rendered you the services which you expected of me. If any one is to accuse me of excessive severity or of abusing the power with which your Majesty has entrusted me, such an accusation should come, surely, from an adversary of your Majesty’s policy. Believe me when I tell you that society is as deeply disturbed as ever it was, for, during the few weeks that I have been in office, I have unfortunately not yet succeeded in curing the ulcerous diseases which are preying upon it. Anarchical passions are still seething and fermenting amongst the lower strata of the people.

“I do not wish to lay this festering wound bare to you, or to exaggerate its horror, but it is my duty to remind you of its existence, so that I may put your Majesty on your guard against the generous impulses of your own heart. One might have hoped that the energy of the Sovereign and the solemnly expressed will of the nation had for ever swept away all abominable periods of public baseness. Events, however, have shown how mournfully unfounded any such hope would be. In the name of the country, sire, I beseech you not to draw back your powerful hand. The danger does not lie in the possession of excessive authority, but in the absence of repressive laws. If you draw back your hand, sire, you will see the scum of the people bubbling up, you will at once find yourself overwhelmed by revolutionary demands, and speedily your most energetic servants will be utterly at a loss how to defend you. I am

allowing myself to press this upon you strongly, so dreadful do the coming dangers appear to me.

“Liberty without restraint is impossible in a country where there exists a faction which is obstinately bent upon misconstruing the principles upon which a government must necessarily be based. Many long years will be necessary before absolute power succeeds in making itself accepted by all, and effaces from men’s memories the recollection of old struggles, and passes so far beyond the pale of discussion that it may be discussed without danger. Outside the principle of despotic power, vigorously exercised, there is no safety for France. The day when your Majesty may consider it your duty to restore to the nation the most harmless of its liberties, on that day you will be committed to everything. One liberty cannot be granted without a second ; then comes a third one, and everything is ultimately swept away, both institutions and dynasties. It is like an implacable devouring piece of machinery. First, the tip of the finger is seized, then the hand is drawn in, then the arm, and finally the whole body is crushed and ground to pieces.

“And, sire, since I have ventured to express myself so freely on this matter, I will make this further remark. Parliamentarism once destroyed a monarchy ; do not let us allow it to destroy an empire. The Corps Légitif ventures to interfere too much as it is. Do not allow it any further share in directing the Sovereign’s policy. To do so will only be giving rise to still noisier and more deplorable discussions. The last general elections have once again testified to the country’s gratitude, but none the less, there have been five candidates elected whose disgraceful success ought to act as a warning. To-day the all-important question is to prevent the formation of an opposition minority ; and, what is still more important, to take care not to provide it—if by any unhappy chance it should actually come into existence—with weapons which may enable it to contend audaciously against constituted authority. A parliament which holds its tongue is a parliament which does some work.

“As for the press, sir, it is turning liberty into license. Since I have joined the ministry I have read the papers carefully, and every morning I am filled with fresh disgust. The press is the receptacle of all the nauseous leaven of every kind. It foments revolutions, and it is an ever burning fire whence

the blaze of arson takes its rise. It will only become useful when we have brought it under our authority and can use its influence as an instrument of government. At present I say nothing of other kinds of liberty, such as the liberty of combination, of meeting, or the liberty of doing anything a man likes. These, however, are all respectfully asked for in 'Friend Jacques's Evening Chats.' Later on they will be demanded. These are the things I am afraid of. I beg your Majesty to hearken to me. It is necessary that France should for a long time to come feel the weight of a hand of iron upon her."

He went on in this strain for a long time, and defended, with increasing energy, the way in which he had used his authority. For nearly an hour he continued in this fashion, sheltering himself beneath the principle of plenary power, wrapping himself round and covering himself with it, as it were, like a man who wants to avail himself of his armour to the fullest extent possible. Despite his apparent excitement, he still retained sufficient coolness to keep a watch upon his colleagues and to note the effect of his words upon the expressions of their faces, which were now pale and fixed. He stopped speaking quite suddenly and abruptly.

There was a long interval of silence. The Emperor began to play with his paper-knife again.

"His excellency the Minister of the Interior takes too black a view of the situation of the country," at length said the Minister of State. "Our institutions are in no way threatened, I think. Order is perfectly maintained and unbroken. We can trust with confidence to His Majesty's great wisdom. Indeed, it is a lack of confidence to show fear."

"Certainly, certainly," murmured several voices.

"I will add," said the Minister for Foreign Affairs, "that France has never been more respected by Europe than she is now. Everywhere abroad His Majesty's firm and dignified policy is looked upon with the greatest admiration. The opinion of foreign statesmen is that our country has entered upon an everlasting era of peace and greatness."

None of the ministers, however, cared to attack the political programme defended by Rougon. They all looked at Delestang. The latter understood what was expected of him. He began to speak and compared the empire to a building.

"Certainly," he said, "the principle of authority should not be shaken, but there is no necessity for systematically shutting

the door upon all public liberties. The Empire is like some great place of refuge, some vast and magnificent building, the indestructible foundations of which His Majesty has laid with his own hands. He is still engaged in raising its walls. But the day will come when his task will be finished, and he will have to think of how he can crown his edifice, and it is then—”

“Never!” Rougon interrupted, violently. “The whole thing will topple down!”

The Emperor stretched out his hand to stop the discussion. He was smiling and seemed to be waking up from a reverie.

“Well, well,” he said; “we are getting away from immediate affairs. We will see about all this later on.”

Then, when he had risen from his seat, he added :

“It is late, gentlemen; you must breakfast at the château.”

The council was now at an end. The ministers pushed back their chairs and stood up and bowed to the Emperor who retired with short steps. His Majesty, however, turned round and said :

“A word with you, Monsieur Rougon, I beg.”

Then as the Emperor took Rougon aside into the recess of one of the windows, the ministers thronged round Delestang at the other end of the room. They congratulated him in subdued tones, accompanied with meaning winks and smiles and murmured praises. The Minister of State, a man of very liberal mind and great experience, was particularly flattering. He had an idea that it was lucky to have a shallow-pated man for a friend. Delestang bowed with grave modesty to all the compliments that were being lavished upon him.

“No,” said the Emperor to Rougon; “come along with me.”

Then he took him off into his own study, a somewhat small room, the furniture of which was littered over with books and newspapers. He lighted a cigarette and showed Rougon the model, on a reduced scale, of a new cannon which had been invented by an officer. The little weapon looked like a child’s plaything. His Majesty affected a very kindly tone and tried to show the minister that he still continued to possess his favour. Rougon, however, guessed that an explanation of some sort was coming, and he wanted to have the first word.

“Sire,” he began, “I am well aware of the violence with which I am attacked by those who surround your Majesty.”

The Emperor smiled without saying anything. The court had, indeed, again put itself in opposition to Rougon. He was

now accused of abusing his power, and of compromising the Empire by his harshness. The most extraordinary tales were circulated about him, and the corridors of the palace were full of complaints and stories, the echoes of which made themselves heard every morning in the Emperor's study.

“Be seated, Monsieur Rougon, be seated,” his Majesty said, good-naturedly.

Then, taking a seat himself, he continued :

“They quite deafen me with all the things they din into my ears. I prefer quietly talking matters over with you alone. What is this affair of the notary at Niort, who died after being arrested ? A Monsieur Martineau, I think ?”

Rougon quietly told the Emperor the details of the matter. This Martineau, he said, was a man who had very gravely compromised himself ; and he was a republican whose influence in the department was attended with great danger. He had been arrested, and he had since died.

“Yes, that's just it,” replied the Emperor ; “that's the tiresome part of the matter. The opposition papers have got hold of the story, and they relate it in a very mysterious fashion, and with a reticence which is calculated to have a very deplorable effect. I am very much distressed about it, Monsieur Rougon.”

Then he said no more on the subject, but sat for a few moments silently sucking his cigarette.

“You have been down to Deux-Sèvres lately, and you were present at some ceremony there, weren't you ?” he continued presently. “Are you quite satisfied as to Monsieur Kahn's financial stability ?”

“Oh, quite so !” Rougon cried.

Then he launched into a series of explanatory details. Monsieur Kahn, he said, was supported by a very rich English company. The shares of the railway from Niort to Angers were at a premium at the Bourse. The undertaking had as good prospects as could well be imagined. The Emperor, however, seemed incredulous.

“I have heard a certain amount of fear expressed,” he said. “You can understand that it would be very unfortunate for your name to be mixed up with a catastrophe. However, since you tell me that there is no fear of anything of the kind—”

He now dropped this second subject and went on to a third.

“Now, about the prefect of Deux-Sèvres. He is very unpopular, they tell me. He appears to have thrown everything

into confusion down there. I hear too, that he is the son of a retired bailiff, whose strange vagaries are the talk of the whole department. Monsieur du Poizat is a friend of yours, I believe?"

"One of my best friends, sire."

As the Emperor now rose from his seat, Rougon rose also. The former stepped up to a window, and then came back again, puffing out small wreathes of smoke.

"You have a good many friends, Monsieur Rougon," he said with a meaning look.

"Yes, sire; a great many," the minister replied frankly.

Hitherto the Emperor had evidently been merely repeating the gossip of the château, and the accusations made by those who surrounded him. He was acquainted, however, with other stories and matters which were unknown to the court, but which he had learnt from his private agents, and in which he took a lively interest, for he was much addicted to the spy system, and revelled in the secret manœuvres of the police. He looked at Rougon for a moment, while a vague smile played about his face. Then, in a confidential tone, and with a somewhat playful air, he said :

"Oh, I know a good many things; more, perhaps, than I care to know. Here is a little matter, now; you have taken into your office a young man, the son of a colonel, although he has not obtained a bachelor's diploma. It is not a matter of any importance, I am quite aware, but if you only knew all the fuss and talk there is about such things! Little things like these seem to put everybody's back up. It is really very bad policy on your part."

Rougon made no reply. His Majesty, however, had not finished. He opened his lips as though he were going to say something, but it was apparently something that he found rather difficult to express, for he hesitated for a moment or two.

"I won't say anything to you," he continued at last, "about that usher one of your protégés; his name is Merle, I think, isn't it? He gets drunk and behaves himself insolently; and both the public and the clerks complain of him. All this is very annoying, very annoying, indeed."

Then he raised his voice, and concluded somewhat bluntly :

"You have too many friends, Monsieur Rougon. All these people do you harm. It would be rendering you a service to make you quarrel with them. Well, at any rate, let me have

Monsieur Du Poizat dismissed, and promise me that you will abandon all the others."

Rougon remained quite impassive. He bowed, and said in the most respectful manner :

"On the contrary, sire, I ask your Majesty for the ribbon of officer of the Legion of Honour for the prefect of Deux-Sèvres. And I have several other favours also to solicit."

He took a memorandum-book out of his pocket, and continued :

"Monsieur Béjuin begs that your Majesty will be graciously pleased to visit his cut-glass works at Saint Florent, when you go to Bourges. Colonel Jobelin desires an appointment in the Imperial Palaces. The usher Merle calls your attention to the fact that he has gained the military medal, and wishes for a tobacco-agency for one of his sisters."

"Is that all ?" asked the Emperor, who had begun to smile again. "You are a magnificent patron. Your friends ought to worship you."

"They do not worship me, sire, they support me," Rougon replied with his blunt frankness.

This expression seemed to make a deep impression upon the Emperor. Rougon had just revealed to him the whole secret of his fidelity. On the day when he allowed his credit to be weakened, on that day his credit would be utterly dead ; and in spite of scandal, in spite of the discontent and treason of his coterie of friends, it was his only possession and support, and he was obliged to keep it sound and unbroken, if he himself wished to remain unshattered likewise. The more he got for his friends, the greater and the less deserved the favours that he lavished upon them, the stronger he was himself.

He added very respectfully, and in a very meaning tone :

"For the sake of the glory of your Majesty's reign, I hope from the bottom of my heart that your Majesty may long preserve about you the devoted servants who have helped you to restore the Empire."

The Emperor was no longer smiling. He took a few steps about the room, with down-cast eyes and abstracted air. He seemed to have turned pale and to be trembling slightly. Presentiments occasionally affected his mystical nature with great force. He terminated the conversation to obviate the necessity of coming to any immediate determination, deferring the accomplishments of his desires till another time. He again

assumed his kindly demeanour ; and, referring to the discussion which had taken place at the council, he even seemed inclined to hold that Rougon was right, now that he could speak freely to him without any danger of committing himself. The country, he said, was certainly not yet ripe for liberty. For a long time to come an energetic hand, and one free from all feebleness, would be necessary to guide matters with resolution and firmness. Then he concluded by again assuring the minister of his entire confidence in him. He gave him full liberty of action, and he confirmed all his previous instructions to him. Rougon, however, thought it necessary to add another word or two on the subject.

“Sire,” he said, “I could never allow myself to be influenced by malevolent gossip. I stand in need of great determination and fixity of purpose to successfully accomplish the task for which I am now responsible.”

“Monsieur Rougon,” replied the Emperor, “go on fearlessly ; I am with you.”

Then, bringing the conversation to a close, he stepped towards the door, followed by the minister. They both went out and crossed several apartments on their way to the dining-room. Just as they reached it, the Emperor turned round and took Rougon aside.

“You don’t approve then,” he said in low tones, “of that scheme for a new nobility ? I should have been very glad to see you support it. Study the matter.”

Then, without waiting for a reply, he added with an air of quiet persistence :

“There’s no great hurry, however. I will wait ; for ten years, if it should be necessary.”

After breakfast, which lasted scarcely half-an-hour, the ministers went into a small adjoining drawing-room where coffee was served. They remained there chatting for a little time, standing round the Emperor. Clorinde, whom the Empress had kept with her all this time, now came to look for her husband, with the easy unconstrained manner of a woman who mixed freely with politicians. She shook hands with several of the ministers. They all clustered round her, and the subject of conversation was changed. His Majesty paid the young woman such marked attention, and kept himself so close to her, that their excellencies thought it discreet to gradually take themselves off. Four of them opening one of the glass doors

went on to the terrace of the château, and these were followed by three others. Only two remained in the room to keep up an appearance of propriety. The Minister of State, with a pleasant expression upon his aristocratic face and a cheery manner, had taken Delestang off with him and was pointing Paris in the distance out to him from the terrace. Rougon, standing out in the sunshine, was also abstractedly gazing at the great city which brooded far away upon the horizon like a mass of bluish cloud beyond the great green carpet of the Bois de Boulogne.

Clorinde was looking very beautiful that morning. Clumsily dressed as usual, and dragging after her her train of pale cherry-coloured silk, she looked as though she had put on her things in great haste, hurried on by the goad of some desire. She was laughing, and her whole demeanour was very free and unreserved. At a ball given by the Naval Minister to which she had gone in the character of the Queen of Hearts, wearing diamond hearts about her neck and her wrists and her knees, she had made a conquest of the Emperor, and ever since that evening she had remained on very friendly terms with him, playfully addressing him every time that he condescended to compliment her upon her beauty.

“ See, Monsieur Delestang,” said the prime minister to his colleague on the terrace, “ see, down there on the left, what a wonderfully soft blue hue there is about the dome of the Panthéon.”

While Delestang was looking admiringly at the prospect, the Minister of State cast furtive glances into the little drawing-room through the open window. The Emperor was bending forward, and was speaking with his lips close to the young woman’s face, while she was bending herself back with tightly strained breast as though to escape from him. Nothing could be seen of His Majesty from outside save an indistinct profile, the tip of an ear, and his heavy mouth buried beneath his moustache. His cheek and glance glowed with a gleam of desire, the sensual appetite of a man intoxicated by the scent emanating from a woman. Clorinde, who was looking irritatingly seductive, was denying herself with an almost imperceptible swaying of her head, while her laughing breath continued to fan the desire which she had so cleverly kindled into a hotter glow.

Just when their excellencies returned into the drawing-room, the young woman exclaimed, without anyone knowing what remark of the Emperor’s she was answering :

"Oh, sire, don't count upon that. I am as obstinate as a mule."

In spite of the previous unpleasantness, Rougon returned to Paris with Delestang and Clorinde. The young woman now appeared anxious to make her peace with him. She no longer manifested that nervous restlessness which impelled her to choose disagreeable subjects of conversation, but she even occasionally looked at Rougon with a glance of smiling compassion. When the landau, passing through the Bois which was all warm and bright in the sunshine, gently drove along the edge of the lake, she murmured with a sigh of enjoyment :

"What a lovely day it is!"

Then, after sitting abstractedly for a moment or two, she said to her husband :

"Tell me, is your sister, Madame de Combelot, still in love with the Emperor?"

"Henriette is mad!" replied Delestang, shrugging his shoulders.

"Yes, indeed, she is still," said Rougon. "They say that she threw herself at His Majesty's feet one day. He raised her up and advised her to wait."

"Ah, yes, indeed. She'll have a long time to wait!" cried Clorinde gaily. "There will be plenty of others before her turn comes!"

CHAPTER XII.

CLORINDE was now revelling in a flush of mystery and power. She was still the big eccentric girl who had scoured Paris on the back of a hired horse in search of a husband, but the big girl had developed into a woman, with a fuller bosom, and more rounded hips, calmly performing the most extraordinary actions, and having at length realised her long cherished dream of becoming a power. Her everlasting prowlings in out-of-the-way neighbourhoods, her correspondence which inundated the four corners of France and Italy with a flood of letters, her continual contact with politicians, with whom she managed to strike up an intimate acquaintance, and all her erratic schemings, full of gaps and illogical as they were, had ended by her gaining real and indisputable influence for herself. She still indulged in strange eccentricities, and let fall wild schemes and extravagant hopes, even when she was talking seriously. When she went out, she still took her tattered portfolio with her, carrying it in her arms like a baby, and with such an air of earnestness that the passers-by smiled as she went along in her dirty, draggling skirts. However, she was consulted now, and even feared. No one could have exactly told the reason of her power ; it seemed to come from various distant and invisible sources, which it would have been very difficult to actually trace out. Nothing more was known than what could be gathered from a few scraps of gossip, and the occasional stories that were whispered about from ear to ear. The young woman's strangely compound character mystified everybody, still her wild imagination was linked to a fund of sound common sense which commanded attention and obedience, and there was her magnificent person, in which, perhaps, lay the true secret of her power. It mattered, however, very little upon what foundations Clorinde's throne was reared. It was sufficient that she did reign, even though in a whimsical, erratic fashion ; and that people bowed down before her.

The young woman had now really entered upon a spell of

power. In her dressing-room, with its litter of dirty basins, she contrived to centralise the policy of all the courts of Europe. She received information and detailed reports, in which the slightest pulsations of the lives of governments were carefully noted, even before the embassies did, and without anyone having the slightest idea from whence she got her news. The consequence of this was that she was surrounded by a court of bankers, and diplomatists, and friends, who came to her in the hope of being able to obtain information from her. The bankers showed her particular attention. She had enabled one of them to gain, in one single haul, a hundred million francs, merely by telling him of an approaching change of ministry in a neighbouring state. She disdained, however, to employ her knowledge for purposes of gain, and she readily told all that she knew, the gossip of diplomatists, and the talk of the different capitals, merely for the pleasure of hearing herself speak, and of showing that she knew what was going on in Turin, Vienna, Madrid, and London, as well as in Berlin and Saint Petersburg. She talked ceaselessly of the state of the different sovereigns' health, of their amours and habits, and of the politicians of the various states, and she had at her fingers' ends the scandalous history of even the very smallest German duchy. She judged statesmen in a single phrase; jumped from north to south without the slightest transition; and spoke carelessly of the different countries of Europe, as though they were her own, and as though the whole vast territory, with its cities and peoples, was shut up in a box of playthings, whose little card-board houses and wooden men she could set up, and move about just as she pleased. Then, when at last her tongue ceased wagging, and she was quite tired out of chattering, she would snap her fingers, as though to express that that was as much as all these things were worth.

Just at present, in the midst of her many tangled schemes and occupations, there was one matter which excited her warmest enthusiasm, and concerning which she tried her best to keep silent, though there were times when she could not deny herself the pleasure of alluding to it. She wanted Venice. When she spoke of the great Italian minister, she referred to him familiarly as "Cavour." "Cavour," she said "did not want it, but I want it, and he has understood." She shut herself up morning and night at the embassy with the Chevalier Rusconi. As she tranquilly leaned back with her goddess-like brow, she

seemed wrapt in a sort of somnambulism, and let fall scraps of unconnected sentences and shreds of revelations ; a hint of a secret interview between the Emperor and some foreign statesman ; of a projected treaty of alliance, some clauses of which were still under discussion, or of a war in the coming spring. On other days she was excited and angry, kicked the chairs about her room and knocked the basins about at the risk of breaking them. On these occasions she looked like an angry queen betrayed by imbecile ministers, who sees her kingdom going from bad to worse ; and she would stretch out her bare majestic arm with a tragic air in the direction of Italy and clench her fist exclaiming : "Ah ! if I were over there, there would be none of this folly going on !"

The cares of the high political aims which she had at heart did not, however, prevent Clorinde from engaging herself in all sorts of other businesses, in which she grew completely absorbed. She was often to be found sitting upon her bed, her great portfolio, emptied of its contents, lying on the middle of the counterpane, while she plunged her arms into a pile of papers, confused, crying with irritation in the midst of all this chaos of documents. Sometimes she would start up and begin to hunt about for some lost paper, which she would at length discover behind some piece of furniture or amongst her old boots or her dirty linen. When she went out to conclude any particular piece of business, she generally contrived to involve herself in two or three fresh affairs on her way. She was for ever rushing about into all sorts of places, and she lived in a perfect whirl of ideas and actions, indeed her mind was a mazy labyrinth of all kinds of intricate, unfathomable plots and intrigues. When she came home again in the evening, after a day's scouring about Paris, her legs quite tired out with climbing up so many flights of steps, and carrying in the folds of her skirts the odours of all the strange haunts which she had visited, no one would have guessed one half of the errands she had been engaged upon in every quarter of the city. And if any one questioned her, she only laughed, and did not herself always remember what she had been doing.

It was about this time that she had the extraordinary whim of engaging a private room in one of the great restaurants on the boulevard. The house in the Rue du Colisée was so far away from everything, she said, and she wanted a room in some central position ; so she turned the private room at the

restaurant into a kind of office. For two months she received there all those who wanted to see her, attended by the waiters, who sometimes had to usher in persons of the highest position. Great functionaries, ambassadors, and ministers presented themselves at the restaurant. Clorinde, entirely at her ease there, made them sit down upon the couch, which had been damaged by a gay supper party during the carnival; while she herself remained in front of the table, the cloth of which was always laid, and often strewn with bread-crumbs and littered with papers. It was a sort of general's camp-life that she lived there. One day when she did not feel very well, she calmly went upstairs to the top of the house and lay down on the landlord's bed. He was a tall, dark man, and waited upon Clorinde, who permitted him to kiss her. She did not go home till nearly midnight.

Delestang, in spite of everything, was a happy man. He appeared to quite ignore his wife's eccentricities. She was now completely master of him, and treated him just as she liked, while he never uttered the least complaint. His natural temperament predisposed him to this kind of servitude. He found far too much happiness in the secret surrender of his authority to attempt to revolt against it. In the privacy of their domestic life, it was he who rendered Clorinde all kinds of little services when she got up in a morning, that is whenever she consented to allow him to share her room. He hunted about everywhere to find her lost boots, or went through all the linen in a chest before he could find a chemise that was not in holes. He was quite satisfied in preserving his serene appearance of superiority for the outer world. The air of unruffled calm and loving protection with which he spoke of his wife in public won him respect everywhere.

Clorinde, now become a person of great influence, had a strong wish to bring her mother back from Turin. She intended, she said, that the Countess Balbi should henceforth spend six months of each year with her. She seemed to be suddenly overwhelmed with an outburst of filial affection. She threw a whole floor of her house into confusion, so as to arrange apartments for the old lady as near her own as possible. She even opened out a door of communication between her dressing-room and her mother's bedroom. In Rougon's presence especially she made an excessive parade of her affection, indulging in exaggerated Italian expressions of endearment.

How had she ever been able, she wondered, to resign herself to such a long separation from her mother, she who, before her marriage, had never left her for an hour? She accused herself of want of heart. But it was not her fault, she protested; she had been forced to yield to other people's advice and to give way before pretended necessities, in which even now she could see no force. Rougon remained quite unmoved by all this rebellion. He had altogether ceased to lecture her, and he no longer attempted to make her one of the most distinguished women in Paris. In former days she had filled up the gap in his life, when the restless fever of his inactivity stirred up his blood and awoke desires in his then idle brawny frame. But now that he was in the forefront of the battle, he felt no inclination to think about such things, and what little sensuality there was in him was quite suppressed or kept under by his daily fourteen hours of work. He still continued to treat her with an air of affection, mingled with that kind of contempt which he usually manifested for women. He came to see her every now and then; and then, at times, his eyes lighted up with a gleam of his old and still unsatiated passion. She was still his one weakness; the one woman who perturbed his flesh.

Since Rougon had gone to live in the official residence of the Minister of the Interior where his friends complained that they could no longer come and see him in a homely easy fashion, Clorinde had thought of receiving the coterie at her own house, and it had gradually become a custom for them to go there. To mark more plainly the fact that these receptions took the place of those in the Rue Marbeuf, she fixed them for the same evenings, namely Sundays and Thursdays. There was this difference, however, that in the Rue du Colisée the guests remained till one o'clock in the morning. Clorinde received them in her boudoir, as Delestang still kept in his own possession the keys of the big drawing-room for fear of it being damaged by grease-spots. As the boudoir was a very small apartment, Clorinde left the doors of her dressing-room and bed-room open; so that, very frequently, the friends were to be found crowding together in the sleeping-chamber amid the litter of the young woman's clothes.

On Thursdays and Sundays, Clorinde made an especial point of hastening home in sufficient time to enable her to get through her dinner and be ready to receive her guests. But, in spite of all her efforts to remember these evening receptions of

hers, she twice forgot all about them, and was taken quite aback at seeing a crowd of people in her bed-room when she returned home after midnight. One Thursday, towards the end of May, she got home at the unusually early hour of five. She had been out on foot and had preferred to walk all the way from the Place de la Concorde in a drenching fall of rain rather than pay thirty sous for a cab. She was quite soaked, and she went straight to her dressing-room, where her maid Antonia, whose mouth was smeared with jam, undressed her, laughing merrily at the stream of water which poured from her mistress's clothes on to the floor.

"There is a gentleman come to see you," said Antonia, presently, as she sat down on the floor to take off Clorinde's boots. "He has been waiting for an hour."

Clorinde asked her what he was like. The maid, with her greasy dress and unkempt hair, and her white teeth gleaming in her dusky face, remained sitting upon the floor. The gentleman, she said, was fat, and pale, and cross-looking.

"Oh, it must be Monsieur Reuthlinguer the banker," cried Clorinde. "I remember now, he was to come at four o'clock. Well, let him wait. You've got the bath ready for me, haven't you?"

Then she quietly proceeded to get into the bath which was concealed behind a curtain in a corner of the room. While she was in it, she read the letters which had arrived during her absence. In quarter of an hour's time, Antonia, who had left the room a few minutes before, came back again.

"The gentleman saw you come in," she said to Clorinde. "He will be very glad to speak to you."

"Oh, dear, I'd forgotten all about him!" cried Clorinde, standing up in the middle of the bath. "Come and dress me."

Clorinde showed much capriciousness over her toilette that evening. In spite of the neglect which she displayed towards her person, she was occasionally seized with a sudden idolatry for it. At these times she indulged in the most elaborate toilette; and, standing naked in front of her mirror, she had her limbs rubbed with ointments and balms and aromatic oils, of a nature known only to herself, and which had been bought at Constantinople, so she said, from the perfumer to the Seraglio, by a friend of hers, an Italian diplomatist. While Antonia was rubbing her, she threw herself into statuesque attitudes. This anointing made her skin white and soft, and

kept it as imperishably beautiful as marble. One of the oils, of which she herself carefully counted the drops as she let them fall to a little piece of flannel, had the miraculous quality of at once effacing every slightest wrinkle. After this business was over, she commenced a minute examination of her hands and feet. She could have spent a whole day in adoring herself.

At the end of three quarters of an hour, however, when Antonia had slipped a chemise and a petticoat over her, she suddenly seemed to recollect herself.

“Oh, dear, the baron!” she cried. “Well, show him in here! He’s seen a woman before, I daresay.”

Monsieur de Reuthlinguer had been sitting patiently waiting in Clorinde’s boudoir, with his hands clasped over his knees, for the last two hours and more. He was a pale frigid man of austere morals, the possessor of one of the largest fortunes in Europe, and he had been in the habit for some time past of thus dancing attendance upon Clorinde twice or thrice a week.

He even took her to his own house, that abode of rigid decorum and glacial strictness, where the young woman’s startling unconventionalism quite shocked the footmen.

“Good day, baron!” Clorinde exclaimed. “I’m getting my hair dressed, so don’t look.”

She was half-naked, her chemise having slipped down from her shoulders. An indulgent smile played round the baron’s pale lips. He remained standing quite close to her, without a quiver of his eyelids, after bowing to her with the most respectful courtesy.

“You’ve come for news, haven’t you?” the young woman asked. “Well, I’ve just heard something.”

She got up and dismissed Antonia, who went away leaving the comb stuck in her mistress’s hair. Clorinde seemed afraid of being overheard, for laying her hand upon the banker’s shoulder and standing on tiptoe she whispered something into his ear. As the banker listened to her, his eyes remained fixed upon her bosom which was close to him, but he was not noticing it. He nodded his head briskly.

“There!” concluded the young woman, raising her voice. “You can go now.”

The banker took hold of her arm and brought her back towards him to ask for certain explanations. He could not have been calmer or more at his ease if he had been talking to

one of his clerks. When he left her, he invited her to come and dine at his house on the following day. His wife was very anxious to see her again, he said. She accompanied him to the door. Then she suddenly crossed her arms over her bosom and turned very red as she exclaimed :

“ Good gracious ! I was actually about to go out with you like this ! ”

She now began to scold Antonia for not making more haste. She would never get finished ! she cried ; and then she scarcely gave the girl time to dress her hair, saying that she hated being so long over her toilette. In spite of the time of the year, she insisted upon wearing a long robe of black velvet, a sort of flounced blouse, drawn in at the waist with a red silk sash. Twice already, a servant had been up to tell her that dinner was served. As she passed through her bedroom, she found three gentlemen, of whose presence there no one had had the least idea. They were the three political refugees, Signori Brambilla, Staderino and Viscardi. Clorinde, however, showed no surprise at finding them there.

“ Have you been waiting for me long ? ” she asked.

“ Yes, yes,” they replied, gently nodding their heads.

They had arrived before the banker, and had not made the least noise. Political misfortunes had made them silent and reflective. They were seated side by side on the same couch, all three lying back in the same position, and holding extinguished cigars in their lips. They now rose and clustered round Clorinde, and a rapid muttered conversation in Italian took place. The young woman seemed to be giving them instructions. One of the refugees took notes in cipher in a pocket-book, while the others, appearing much excited by what they heard, stifled slight cries with their gloved hands. Then they all three went off in single file, with quite an impenetrable expression of face.

Upon this Thursday evening it had been arranged that a conference of several of the ministers should take place on a very important financial matter. When Delestang went off after dinner, he promised Clorinde that he would bring Rougon back with him, at which his wife made a little grimace which seemed to express that she was not very anxious to see him. There was as yet no break in their friendship, but the young woman showed an increasing coldness towards him.

Towards nine o’clock, Monsieur Kahn and Monsieur Béjuin

arrived. They were the first of the friends to put in an appearance. They were soon followed by Madame Correur. They found Clorinde in her bedroom, lolling in a lounging-chair. She complained of one of those extraordinary and unheard-of troubles which suddenly came upon her every now and then. She had swallowed a fly, she said, while drinking, and she could feel it flying about inside her stomach. Draped in her great black velvet blouse, her shoulders supported by three pillows, she looked superbly beautiful with her pale face and naked arms, just like some outstretched figure sleeping over a monument. At her feet, was Luigi Pozzo, gently twanging the strings of a guitar. He had deserted painting for music.

"Sit down, won't you?" she said. "Please excuse me. A wretched little insect has got inside me somehow."

Pozzo went on twanging his guitar, and singing in a low voice, with an ecstatic expression on his face, and apparently lost in a reverie. Madame Correur wheeled a chair up to Clorinde's side, and Monsieur Kahn and Monsieur Béjuin, after a little searching, also succeeded in finding themselves seats. It was not an easy matter to do so, for the five or six chairs in the room were hidden beneath a litter of dresses and petticoats. When Colonel Jobelin and his son Auguste arrived five minutes later, they had to remain standing.

"Go, my dear," said Clorinde to Auguste, whom she still treated quite familiarly in spite of his seventeen years, "go and bring two chairs out of my dressing-room."

They were cane-seated chairs, from which all the varnish had been worn away by the damp linen which was constantly hung over their backs. The bedroom was lighted by a single lamp covered by a shade of rose-coloured paper. There was another in the dressing-room and a third in the boudoir, which seemed, through the open door, to be full of dusky shadow as though it were illuminated by nothing more than a night-light. The bedroom itself, which had once been hung with a tender mauve that had now turned to a pale grey, seemed full of a floating haze, in which the eye could scarcely distinguish the rents in the coverings of the easy-chairs, the dust-marks on the furniture and the big ink-stain on the middle of the carpet. Some ink-stand had fallen there and had even splashed the wainscotting. The bed-curtains had been drawn, probably with a view to concealing the untidy condition of the bed. In the midst of this hazy gloom, there was a strong scent as though all the bottles

and flasks in the dressing-room were uncorked. Clorinde obstinately refused, even in warm weather, to have any of the windows open.

“What a nice scent you’ve got here,” said Madame Correur, complimentarily.

“Oh, it’s I who smell so nice,” the young woman replied naïvely.

Then she began to talk about the essences which she said she got direct from the perfumer to the Sultanas. She held her naked arm under Madame Correur’s nose. Her black velvet blouse had got a little disarranged, and her feet, in their little red slippers, showed below it. Pozzo, languid and intoxicated by the strong perfumes which she exhaled, was tapping his instrument gently with his thumb. .

At the end of a few minutes, the conversation of necessity turned upon Rougon. It invariably did so every Thursday and Sunday. The coterie of friends seemed only to come together to discuss this one everlasting subject. They were feeling an ever-growing rancour against the great man and a necessity for solacing themselves by ceaseless recriminations. Clorinde no longer had to take any trouble to set them going. They always arrived with a fresh burden of troubles, discontented and jealous, seemingly only the more embittered by what Rougon had done for them, and burning with a violent fever of ingratitude.

“Have you seen the fat man, to-day?” the colonel asked.

Rougon was no longer “the great man.”

“No,” said Clorinde, “but we may see him here this evening. My husband persists in bringing him to see me.”

“I was in a café this afternoon, where they were criticizing him very severely,” the colonel continued, after a pause. “They say that his position is very shaky, and that he won’t last another two months.”

Monsieur Kahn made a gesture expressive of contempt.

“Well, for my part,” he said, “I don’t give him three weeks. Rougon, you see, is not a man cut out for governing. He is too fond of power, and gets intoxicated with it ; and then he strikes out right and left and treats people with a revolting harshness. In these last five months, he has been guilty of the most monstrous acts.”

“Yes, yes, indeed,” the colonel interrupted ; “all kinds of injustices and unfairnesses and absurdities. He abuses his power, most certainly he does.”

Madame Correur said nothing, but she expressed, by a gesture, her opinion that Rougon had not got a particularly well balanced head.

"Ah, yes, indeed," said Monsieur Kahn, noticing the gesture. "He hasn't got a well fixed head, has he?"

Monsieur Kahn saw that the others were looking at him, and he felt that he was called upon to say something.

"No! Rougon's not at all an able man," he remarked; "not at all."

Clorinde lay back on her pillows, gazing at the luminous circle cast by the lamp upon the ceiling, and she let the friends talk on. When they paused, she said, with the intention of setting them going again:

"There is no doubt that he has abused his power, but he asserts that he has done everything with which people reproach him for the sole purpose of obliging his friends. I was talking to him on the subject the other day. The services which he has rendered you—"

"Rendered us! rendered us! us indeed!" they all four cried furiously at once.

Then they began to speak together, protesting against any such insinuation. Monsieur Kahn, however, shouted the others down.

"The services which he has rendered me! That's a fine joke, that is! I had to wait for two whole years before getting my grant, and the consequence has been that the prospects of the scheme, which were once very brilliant, have now suffered considerably. If he is such a friend of mine, why doesn't he come to my assistance now? I have asked him to obtain the Emperor's sanction to a bill authorising the amalgamation of my company with the Western Company, and he has told me that I must wait. Rougon's services to me, indeed! I should like to know what they are! He has never done anything for me, and he can't do anything now!"

"And do you imagine that I am indebted to him for anything?" cried the colonel, breaking in before Madame Correur, who was just going to say something. "He surely doesn't take any credit to himself for that commander's cross, which had been promised to me for five years and more? He has taken Auguste into his office, it is true; but I bitterly regret now that I ever let the boy go there. If I had put him into business he would have been earning twice as much. That wretched Rougon told me only yesterday that he would not be

able to increase Auguste's pay for another eighteen months. This is the way he ruins his credit for the sake of his friends!"

At last Madame Correur was able to get a word in, and relieve her feelings.

"Did he mention my name?" she said, bending towards Clorinde. "I have never asked anything from him; and I have yet to learn the colour of his services towards me. He surely can't pretend to say that he has ever done anything for me; and if I liked to talk—I have certainly asked him for favours on behalf of my friends. I don't deny that. I delight in being of use to any one. This I must say, however, that everything he has a hand in seems to turn out badly, and his favours seem to bring nothing but ill-luck with them. There's that poor Herminie Billecoq, an old pupil of Saint Denis, who was seduced by an officer, and for whom Rougon procured a dowry. Well, the poor girl came to me with a dreadful story this morning. There's no chance of her getting married after all, for the officer has absconded, taking the dowry with him. Anything that Rougon has done has been done for others, and not for myself. When I came back from Coulonges, after the settlement of my brother's affairs, I went to tell him about the tricks Madame Martineau had been playing about the division of the property. I wanted the house in which I was born to form part of my share, but the wretched woman had contrived to keep it herself. Well, do you know what was the only answer I could get out of Rougon? He told me three times over that he couldn't trouble himself any further about this miserable business!"

Monsieur Béjuin now began to show signs of excitement.

"I am exactly in the same position as Madame Correur," he said. "I have never asked Rougon for anything—never once! Anything that he may have done has been done in spite of me, and without my knowing anything about it. He avails himself of one's disinterestedness to take every advantage of one."

His words died away into a mutter; and then the four friends sat silently wagging their heads.

Presently Monsieur Kahn resumed, in a solemn voice:

"The truth of the matter is this," he said. "Rougon is an utterly ungrateful fellow. You can all remember how we used to scour about Paris, working hard to get him back into office. We devoted ourselves to his cause to the extent of even losing our meals. He contracted a debt towards us which his whole

life could not fairly discharge. Now, however, he finds gratitude too heavy a burden for him, and he cuts us all adrift. Well, we might have expected as much!"

"Yes, yes, indeed," cried the others. "He owes everything to us, and he's repaying us in a nice fashion for what we've done for him."

Then for a while they completely overwhelmed Rougon with the enumeration of all the things they had done for him; and when one was silent another brought forward some still more crushing incident. The colonel, however, now suddenly became uneasy about Auguste. The young man had disappeared from the bedroom. Just at this moment a peculiar noise was heard in the dressing-room—a sort of gentle, continuous dabbling sound. The colonel got up hastily and went to see what it was, and he found Auguste appearing much interested in the bath, which Antonia had forgotten to empty. Slices of lemon, which Clorinde had used for her nails, were floating in the water, and these Auguste was taking out with his fingers, and sniffing at with youthful sensuality.

"The boy is quite a nuisance," murmured Clorinde. "He goes poking about everywhere."

"Really," said Madame Correur, who seemed to have been waiting for the colonel's absence, "what Rougon is most deficient in is tact. Between ourselves, I may say, now that the colonel can't hear us, that it was a great mistake on Rougon's part to take that young man into his office in defiance of the regulations. That is not the kind of service a man should render to his friends. It only brings him into discredit."

Here Clorinde interrupted her.

"Do go, my dear," she said, "and see what they're doing."

Monsieur Kahn began to smile, and, when Madame Correur left the room, he too lowered his voice and put in his word.

"How fine it is to hear her talk," he said. "The colonel has been well looked after by Rougon, and she herself has assuredly no reason to complain. Rougon absolutely compromised himself on her account in that miserable Martineau business. He showed himself very deficient in morality in the matter. It's going a little too far to kill a man for the sake of pleasing an old friend, isn't it?"

He now got up and began to take short steps about the room. Then he went into the ante-room to get his cigar case

out of his overcoat and while he was away, the colonel and Madame Correur came back.

"Hallo! has Kahn gone?" exclaimed the colonel. "Well, we others may have broken Rougon's back," he continued without pausing, "but it's Kahn, I think, who has given him the fatal blow. I don't like being unkind, and just now I kept from saying anything; but in the *café* where I was this afternoon, it was openly said that Rougon was falling through having lent his name to that great swindle of a railway from Niort to Angers. They don't mince matters about the great fat imbecile who fires mines and make speeches a mile long, and even tries to make the Emperor responsible for the success of the line. It's Kahn, my good friends, who's made a mess of it for us all! Don't you agree with me, Béjuin?"

Monsieur Béjuin briskly nodded his head. He had already agreed with Madame Correur and Monsieur Kahn. Clorinde, who was still lying down on the couch, was occupying herself by biting the tassel of her girdle, which she kept drawing over her face as though she wanted to tickle herself. She now widely opened her big smiling eyes.

"Hush!" she said.

Monsieur Kahn was just coming back into the room, biting off the end of a cigar between his teeth. He lighted it and blew out two or three great puffs of smoke, for smoking was allowed in Clorinde's bed-room. Then, resuming the thread of his previous remarks, he said:

"Well, if Rougon asserts that he has weakened his power by serving us, I can truthfully declare on the other hand that we have been dreadfully compromised by his patronage. He has a rough brutal way of pushing one forward, hurling one along as though he wanted to break one's nose against a wall. And now, as a result of all these violent ways of his, he's tumbling down again. Well, I for my part feel no desire to help to pick him up any more. If a man can't preserve his own credit, there must be something wrong with him. I tell you that he is seriously compromising us. I have got heavy enough responsibilities as it is, and I give him up now."

He spoke hesitatingly, however, and his voice was not very firm. Madame Correur and the colonel bent their heads to escape the necessity of declaring themselves as strongly as Monsieur Kahn had done. In spite of everything, Rougon

was still in office, and before abandoning him, they wanted to see their way to some other powerful patron.

"The fat man isn't everybody," said Clorinde carelessly.

They all looked at her eagerly, hoping she was going to make them some formal promise. But she made a slight gesture, as though to bid them have a little patience. These silent hints of some new patronage which was going to shower down benefits upon them was really at the bottom of their assiduous attendance at the young woman's Sundays and Thursdays. Amongst the odours of her strongly scented room they sniffed a coming day of triumph. They believed that they had exhausted Rougon in the satisfaction of their early desires and ambitions, and now they were looking forward to the advent of some new power which should realise for them their more recent dreams and longings, which had vastly increased in scope and extent.

Clorinde at last raised herself up from her pillows. Leaning her elbow upon the arm of her chair, she suddenly bent forward towards Pozzo and blew into his neck; laughing loudly as she did so, as though thrilled with some wild impulse of merriment. Whenever she felt pleased, she was often seized by these sudden outbursts of childish gaiety. Pozzo, whose hand seemed to have gone to sleep on his guitar, threw back his picturesque Italian head and showed his white teeth, while his whole body quivered tremulously at the soft touch of the young woman's breath, as though he were being tickled. Clorinde went on laughing and blowing with increasing force till at last he begged for mercy. Then, when she had scolded him in Italian, she turned towards Madame Correur.

"He must sing to us, mustn't he?" she said. "If he will sing, I won't blow any more, but let him be quiet. He has composed a very pretty song."

Then they all asked to hear the song. Pozzo now began to finger his guitar again; and he sang his song, keeping his eyes fixed upon Clorinde. It was a passionate murmur accompanied by short soft notes. The Italian words, tremulously sighed out, could not be distinguished; and at the last couplet, which seemed to be expressive of the pains of love, Pozzo, who had now assumed a mournful tone, began to smile with an expression of mingled joy and despair. When he finished, his audience enthusiastically applauded him. Why didn't he publish these charming songs of his? they asked. His position in the

diplomatic service surely presented no obstacle to his doing so.

"I once knew a captain who brought out a comic opera," said Colonel Jobelin; "and nobody in the regiment thought any the worse of him for it."

"Ah, but in the diplomatic service—" murmured Madame Correur, shaking her head.

"Oh, I think you are quite wrong there," remarked Monsieur Kahn. "Diplomatists are like other men, and many of them cultivate the pleasing arts."

Clorinde now touched Pozzo lightly with her foot and whispered something to him. The young man got up, laid his guitar down on a heap of clothes and left the room. When he returned, some five minutes afterwards, he was followed by Antonia, carrying a tray on which were a water-bottle and some glasses. Pozzo himself was carrying a sugar-basin, for which there was no room on the tray. There was never anything drunk at Cloinde's receptions stronger than sugared-water, and her friends knew that she regarded them with increased pleasure if they simply took the water by itself.

"Hallo! what's that?" she exclaimed, turning towards the dressing-room, where a door could be heard creaking.

Then, as though recollecting, she said:

"Oh, it's my mother! She's been in bed."

It was, indeed, the Countess Balbi; she made her appearance in a black woollen dressing-gown, and she had tied a piece of lace round her head, the ends of which hung down to her neck. Flaminio, the big footman with the long beard and brigand's face, was supporting her from behind. He was almost carrying her, indeed, in his arms. She did not appear to have aged at all, and her pale face still smiled with its old smile which spoke of the time when she had been a queen of beauty.

"Here, mother!" cried Clorinde, "I'll give you this lounging-chair. I'll go and lie down on the bed. I'm not feeling very well. I've got an insect inside me; and it's begun to bite me again."

There was a general movement. Pozzo and Madame Correur assisted the young woman to her bed. They had to turn down the coverings and flatten the pillows. The Countess Balbi, in the meantime, lay down in the lounging-chair. Flaminio remained standing behind her, black and silent, and glaring ferociously at the visitors.

" You don't mind my lying down, do you ? " said Clorinde. " I feel much better when I lie down. I'm not going to send you away. You must stay where you are."

She was lying down at full length, leaning her elbow upon the pillow, and spreading out her black blouse which looked like a stream of ink upon the white counterpane. No one had had any idea of going away. Madame Correur was talking in whispered tones to Pozzo of the perfection of Clorinde's figure, which they had just been supporting. Monsieur Kahn, Monsieur Béjuin and the colonel were paying their respects to the countess, who nodded her head smilingly to them. Every now and then she kept saying in a soft voice, without turning round :

" Flaminio ! "

The tall footman knew what she meant, and he raised a cushion or brought a stool, or took a scent bottle out of his pocket, preserving in all he did his ferocious air of a brigand in a black coat.

Auguste then happened to have an accident. He had been prowling about the three rooms, stopping to examine all the female garments that were lying about. Then, beginning to feel a little bored, he had begun to drink glass after glass of sugared-water. Clorinde had been keeping her eye upon him for the last few minutes, watching the sugar-basin growing gradually empty, when all at once the youth broke his glass in which he had been pressing his spoon too violently.

" It's all because he puts too much sugar in ! " cried Clorinde.

" Dunderhead ! " exclaimed the colonel. " You can't even drink water rationally ! One big glass every morning and evening. There is nothing better. It keeps away all diseases."

Monsieur Bouchard, fortunately, now made his appearance. It was past ten o'clock. He had had to dine out in town, and that had caused him to be a little late. He seemed surprised at not finding his wife there.

" Monsieur d'Escorailles said he would bring her, " he remarked, " and I promised I would call for her and take her home."

Half an hour later, Madame Bouchard at length arrived, accompanied by Monsieur d'Escorailles and Monsieur de la Rouquette. After a coolness which had lasted a year, the young Marquis had returned to his allegiance to the pretty blonde. They had now been reconciled for a week, and their intimacy

had again acquired its old freedom. They could not keep themselves from squeezing and kissing, when they met each other behind a door. They had met Monsieur La Rouquette as they were driving in an open carriage to the Delestangs', and then they had all three gone on to the Bois together, laughing loudly and indulging in somewhat broad pleasantries ; indeed Monsieur d'Escorailles had even fanciel for a moment that he had detected the deputy's arm behind Madame Bouchard's waist. They brought with them into the room a whiff of gaiety, fresh from the dark avenues of the Bois full of sleeping leaves, beneath which they had just passed so merrily.

"Yes, we've been to the lake," Monsieur La Rouquette said. "They insisted upon taking me off. I was going home quietly to work."

He suddenly assumed a serious expression. During the last session he had made a speech upon a financial question after a whole month's special study of his subject, and ever since then he had affected a steady-going air as though he had buried his youthful frivolities beneath the speaker's tribune.

"By the way," began Kahn, taking him off to the end of the room, "you who are on such good terms with Marsy—"

Then he spoke in a very low tone and nothing further could be heard. Pretty Madame Bouchard, who had bowed to the countess, was now sitting at the side of the bed, holding Clorinde's hand in her own, and sympathizing with her in her flutey voice. Monsieur Bouchard was standing in a prim and dignified attitude.

"I have something to tell you," he suddenly exclaimed in the midst of the buzz of the different conversations. "He's a nice sort of fellow is our fat man !"

Before explaining himself, however, he began to rail at Rougon as the others had done. It would now be impossible, he said, ever to ask him for anything again, for he could not even make a polite answer ; and Monsieur Bouchard considered that politeness came before everything. As they continued to ask him what Rougon had done, he at last told them.

"I can't bear injustice," he began. "I spoke to him about one of the clerks in my division, Georges Duchesne ; you know him, you've met him at my house. He's a young fellow of sterling merit, and we treat him just as though he were our own son. My wife is very fond of him, as he comes from the same part of the country. Well, we have been scheming

lately to get Duchesne appointed assistant-under-secretary. It was my idea, and you quite approved of it, didn't you, Adèle?"

Madame Bouchard looked embarrassed and bent forward towards Clorinde to escape the glance of Monsieur d'Escorailles which she felt was fixed upon her.

"Well," continued the under-secretary, "how do you think the fat man received my request? He glared at me in his offensive way for a full minute, and then he bluntly refused to make the appointment. When I pressed the matter, he said to me with a smile: 'Monsieur Bouchard, don't press your request; you distress me. There are very grave reasons why I cannot accede to it.' I couldn't get him to say another word. He saw, however, that I was very much put out and hurt, and so he begged me to remember him kindly to my wife."

That very evening Madame Bouchard had had a rather lively passage with Monsieur d'Escorailles on the subject of this Georges Duchesne.

"Oh well!" she now said rather petulantly, "Monsieur Duchesne will have to wait. I don't know that we need trouble ourselves about him."

But her husband seemed very determined about the matter.

"No, no," he returned; "he deserves to be assistant-under-secretary, and he shall be! My credit is involved. Oh, I really can't stand injustice!"

He grew so excited that they were obliged to do what they could to soothe him. Clorinde, who appeared somewhat abstracted, tried to get up a conversation with Monsieur Kahn and Monsieur La Rouquette, who had settled themselves down by the foot of the bed. The former was explaining the state of his affairs. His great undertaking of the railway between Niort and Angers was in a very critical position. The shares had at first been sold on the Bourse at a premium of eighty francs, before a single stroke of work had been done. Relying upon his much-talked-of English company, Monsieur Kahn had indulged in the most reckless speculation, and now the whole business was on the verge of bankruptcy unless he could at once obtain some powerful support.

"Some time ago," he said, "Marsy offered to bring about a sale of the concern to the Western Company. For myself I'm quite ready to enter into negotiations. We should only want to get an act passed."

Clorinde now quietly beckoned to them, and they both went and leant over the bed and began a long conversation with her. Marsy, the young woman said, bore no spite. She would speak to him on the subject, and she would offer him the million francs which he had asked for the previous year as his price for supporting the concession. His position as President of the Corps Législatif would make it an easy matter for him to get the necessary act passed.

“Marsy’s the only one who’s any good in matters of this kind,” she said with a smile. “If you try to manage without him, you’ll only have to call him in later on to patch up the broken pieces.”

Everyone in the room was now speaking at once. Madame Correur was telling Madame Bouchard of her latest desire, namely to go and die at Coulonges in the family home. She grew quite pathetic as she spoke of the neighbourhood where she had been born, and she said that she would compel Madame Martineau to give up this house which was so full of the associations of her childhood. The men were again on the subject of Rougon. It seemed as though they could not keep off it. Monsieur d’Escorailles was describing the anger of his father and mother, who had written to him upon learning how Rougon was abusing his power, bidding him break with the minister and return to the Council of State. The colonel related how the fat man had flatly refused to ask the Emperor for a place for him in the imperial palaces. Monsieur Béjuin was complaining that His Majesty had not paid a visit to the cut-glass works at Saint Florent upon the occasion of his journey to Bourges, although Rougon had solemnly promised that he would obtain him this favour. In the midst of all this Babel the Countess Balbi sat smiling in her lounging-chair, looking at her still plump hands.

“Flaminio!” she said, softly.

The tall footman took a little tortoise-shell box filled with mint lozenges out of his waist-coat pocket, and the countess crunched them with an appearance of quiet enjoyment.

It was nearly midnight before Delestang returned home. When they saw him raising the curtain that covered the doorway leading to the boudoir, they all became silent at once and every head was anxiously turned towards him. But he dropped the curtain again; there was no one with him. Then, after a

few more moments' silence, the guests broke out into various exclamations :

“Are you by yourself ?”

“You haven't brought him with you then ?”

“Have you lost the fat man on the way ?”

There was a general feeling of relief, however. Delestang explained that Rougon had felt very tired and had left him at the corner of the Rue Marbeuf.

“And a good thing too !” said Clorinde, stretching herself out on the bed ; “he's not very amusing.”

This was the signal for a fresh outburst of complaints and accusations. Delestang protested and tried to get a word in. He usually affected to defend Rougon.

“There is no doubt that he might have acted better than he has done towards certain of his friends,” he said in slow deliberate tones as soon he was allowed to speak. “But, in spite of everything, he's a wonderfully clever fellow. I myself shall be eternally grateful to him.”

“Grateful for what ?” cried Monsieur Kahn, snappishly.

“For all that he has done—”

The others angrily interrupted him. Rougon had never done anything for him, they cried. What was it that he supposed Rougon had done for him ?

“You quite surprise me !” the colonel said, “It is ridiculous pushing modesty to that extent. You don't stand in need of anyone's help, my dear friend. You have succeeded through your own merits.”

Then they all began to sound Delestang's praises. His model farm at La Chamade was something unparalleled, they asserted, and it had long ago proved that he possessed all the qualifications of an able administrator and statesman. He had a quick eye, a clear mind, and a hand that was energetic without being rough. And then, had not the Emperor himself manifested the greatest appreciation of him all along ? His Majesty and himself were in accord upon almost every point.

“Pooh !” Monsieur Kahn ended by saying ; “it is you who keep Rougon up. If you weren't his friend and didn't support him in the council, he would come to grief in a fortnight at the outside.”

Delestang went on with his protestations. He himself, he said, might indeed be of some service, but it was only right to give everyone his due. That very evening, at the Ministry of

Justice in discussing a very complicated financial question, Rougon had given proof of extraordinary lucidity of mind.

"Oh yes, I daresay," said Monsieur La Rouquette scornfully ; "the cunning of a dodgy attorney."

Clorinde had not yet opened her lips. The visitors kept glancing at her as though they were expecting her to say something. But she kept on rolling her head over her pillow, as though she were trying to rub the back of her neck upon it.

"That's right ; scold him," she said at last, speaking of her husband, though without mentioning him by name. "He will have to be beaten into taking his real place."

"The position of Minister for Agriculture and Commerce is quite a secondary one," Monsieur Kahn remarked in order to precipitate matters.

This was touching a sore spot. Clorinde was annoyed at her husband being shelved in what she considered a minor post. She now sharply sprang up into a sitting posture, and let fall the words that everyone had been waiting for.

"He can go to the office of the Interior as soon as ever we wish it," she said.

Delestang tried to say something, but all the company rushed towards him amid an outburst of expressions of delight. Then at last he seemed to give in, a rosy flush suffused his cheeks, and his handsome face beamed with a glow of pleasure. Madame Bouchard and Madame Correur whispered to each other some flattering remarks upon his good looks, and the latter, with a perverted feminine admiration of baldness, cast loving glances at his bare skull. Monsieur Kahn, the colonel and the rest of the company expressed by a series of winks and looks and gestures and hastily uttered words the high estimate they set upon his ability. They prostrated themselves before the feeblest mind of the coterie, and congratulated each other in his person. He, at anyrate, would be an easy and docile master, and would not compromise them. They could set him up as a god with impunity, and need not stand in fear of his thunder-bolts.

"You are quite fatiguing him," exclaimed pretty Madame Bouchard in her tender voice.

Fatiguing him, were they? There was now a general expression of sympathy. Delestang was really looking rather pale now, and he had closed his eyes. Nothing tries a man like brain-work, the visitors remarked to each other with an air of commiseration, and the poor man had been working for five

whole hours ! Then they began gently insisting that he should go to bed. He obeyed them with quiet docility, and left the room after having kissed his wife on the forehead.

It was now one o'clock, and the guests began to speak of retiring. Clorinde, however, said that she was by no means sleepy, and that they might stay on. But no one sat down again. The lamp in the boudoir was dying out, and there was a strong smell of oil in the room. It was with difficulty that they could see to find sundry small articles, Madame Correur's fan, the colonel's stick, or Madame Bouchard's bonnet. Clorinde, calmly stretched out on her bed, stopped Madame Correur just as she was going to ring for Antonia. The maid, she said, always went to bed at eleven o'clock. Just as they were all going away, the colonel suddenly bethought himself of Auguste, whom he had forgotten all about. The young man was found asleep on the couch in the boudoir, with his head lying upon a dress which he had rolled up to form a pillow ; and they scolded him for not having attended to the lamp. In the gloom of the staircase, where the gas was turned very low, Madame Bouchard gave a little scream. She had twisted her foot, she said. Then as the visitors carefully felt their way down the steps, loud peals of laughter were heard in Clorinde's bed-room, where Pozzo had lingered after the others had gone. Probably the young woman was blowing into his neck again.

Every Thursday and Sunday the friends met together in this way, and it was generally reported that Madame Delestang held political receptions. They now showed extremely liberal proclivities, and attacked Rougon's despotic administration. The whole coterie were now dreaming of a sort of democratic empire in which no limit should be set to public liberty. The colonel, in his unemployed moments, drew up codes of rules for trades-unions. Monsieur Béjuin spoke of building cheap houses round his cut-glass works at Saint Florent, and Monsieur Kahn talked to Delestang for hours at a time of the democratic part that the Bonapartes were destined to play in modern society. Every fresh act of Rougon's was hailed with indignant protests and expressions of patriotic alarm lest France should be ruined by the administration of such a man. One day Delestang maintained that the Emperor was the only genuine republican of his time. The coterie assumed all the airs of a religious sect to whom the means of salvation had been exclusively entrusted, and they

undisguisedly began to scheme together to bring about the fat man's overthrow for the good of the country.

Clorinde, however, showed no inclination for hurry. They used to find her lying at full length on one or other of the couches in her rooms, gazing up into the air and examining the corners of the ceiling in a preoccupied manner. When the others prated and protested and walked impatiently about the room, she retained a perfectly blank face and glanced at them every now and then as though bidding them to be more guarded in their language. She now went out less than she had done previously, and she amused herself by dressing as a man, with Antonia's assistance, seemingly to help her while away her time. She manifested, too, a sudden affection for her husband, kissing him before company and talking caressingly to him, and showing a lively anxiety about his health, which was excellent. It might be that she adopted these tactics in order to conceal the absolute command and ceaseless surveillance which she maintained over him. She directed his slightest actions and taught him his lesson every morning like a school-boy who could not be trusted. Delestang showed the most docile obedience. He bowed, smiled, frowned, said black was white or white was black, just as she pulled the string. When he felt that he wanted winding up again, he voluntarily came back to her and placed himself in her hands to be manipulated. But all the while he seemed to outsiders to be the head.

Clorinde still waited. Monsieur Beulin-d'Orchère, who avoided coming to the house in the evening, frequently saw her during the day. He complained bitterly of his brother-in-law, and accused him of making the fortunes of a crowd of strangers, while he seemed to think nothing at all of his own relatives. It was entirely Rougon's doing, he asserted, that the Emperor had not entrusted the seals to himself. Rougon was afraid of having anyone in the council who might get a share of his influence. Clorinde did all she could to whet his anger, she dropped hints of her husband's approaching triumph, and vaguely held out to him a hope of his being included in the new ministry. She was really making use of him to find out what went on at Rougon's house. With feminine vindictiveness she would have liked to see Rougon unhappy in his domestic relations, and she spurred the judge on to persuade his sister to take his side against her husband. He did his best to do so and spoke to her of how he regretted a marriage from which he had

derived no benefit. But his words were quite without effect upon Madame Rougon's quiet placid nature. His brother-in-law, he said to Clorinde, had seemed very nervous lately, and he hinted that the fitting time for his overthrow had now come. He kept his eyes keenly fixed upon the young woman as with the amiable expression of one who is in all innocence retailing the gossip of society, he recounted a whole series of Rougon's characteristic actions. Why did she not act, if she really were the mistress of the situation? he seemed to urge. But Clorinde only stretched herself out into a more lolling position, and put on the same sort of air that she would have worn had she been being kept in the house by wet weather and were patiently resigning herself to wait for the sunshine.

At the Tuileries the young woman's influence was still increasing, and the courtiers spoke in whispered tones of His Majesty's strong caprice for her. At the balls and official receptions and everywhere where the Emperor met her, he was always hanging about her, casting sidelong glances at her and whispering to her with a quiet smile. She had granted him no favour of any kind as yet, they said, not so much as the tips of her fingers. She was playing her old part, the part she had played, when she was looking out for a husband, putting on the most enticing airs, behaving with easy freedom, and saying everything, and showing everything, but always keeping on her guard and making her escape just at the critical moment. She seemed to be letting the Emperor's passion mature and ripen, and to be biding her time and waiting for the hour to come when he would be unable to refuse her any request she might make of him. No doubt she wished to secure the triumph of some long contemplated scheme.

It was about this time that she suddenly began to manifest great affection for Monsieur de Plouguern. For several months past there had been a coolness between them. The senator, who had been most constant in his attendance upon her, coming to see her almost every morning while she was dressing, was much annoyed one day at being refused admission to her while she was engaged upon her toilette. She said, with a blush and apparently overcome by a sudden flush of modesty, that the old man's gleaming grey eyes worried and distressed her. Monsieur de Plouguern, however, refused to come at the same time as other people did, when her rooms were thronged with a crowd of visitors. Wasn't he her father?

he asked, and hadn't he dandled her upon his knees when she was quite a little creature? He used to relate with a snigger how he had administered correction to her in former days, after turning up her petticoats. Matters ended in a complete rupture between them one day, when, in spite of the cries and blows of Antonia, he had forced his way into the room while Clorinde was in her bath. When Monsieur Kahn or Colonel Jobelin used to ask the young woman about him, she replied somewhat stiffly :

"He seems to be growing young again ; he hardly looks twenty. But I am never able to speak to him now."

Then, quite suddenly, Monsieur de Plouguern was to be constantly found at her house. He was there at all times of the day, wandering about her dressing-room and bed-room. He knew where she kept all her under-linen and helped her to put on a chemise or a pair of stockings ; he had even been found lacing her stays. Clorinde exercised all the despotism of a young bride over him.

"Godfather, go and get me my nail-file ! It is in the drawer, you know—Godfather, get me the sponge."

She called him godfather in a caressing, affectionate manner. Monsieur de Plouguern now spoke very frequently of the Count Balbi, and recounted the details of Clorinde's birth. He asserted that he had been introduced to the young woman's mother in the third month of her pregnancy, which was a distinctly false statement. When the countess, with her perpetually smiling faded face, happened to be in the room while her daughter was rising, the senator cast significant glances at the old lady and called her attention with a knowing wink to Clorinde's naked shoulder, or her half-exposed knee.

"Ah, Léonore," he whispered, "she is exactly what you used to be !"

The daughter recalled the mother to him, and his eyes glistened in his skinny face. He frequently reached out his dry hands and took hold of Clorinde, pressing himself closely to her, and telling her some indelicate story. He was a Voltairean, and denied everything, and combated the young woman's lingering scruples.

"Oh you little goose, there's no harm in it," he used to say with a grating snigger like the creak of a rusty lock. "When anything gives you pleasure, there is no harm in doing it."

It was never known to what length matters went between

them. At that time Monsieur de Plouguern was necessary to Clorinde, and she had a part for him to play in the drama of which she was constantly dreaming. It sometimes happened that she bought friendships which proved useless to her when, for some reason or other, she altered her plans. Still the price she had paid seemed to her nothing more than a shake of the hand lightly given and productive of nothing. She felt a lofty scorn of the favours she granted, and with her pride in other matters took the place of ordinary virtue in other women.

She was still patiently biding her time. She talked in obscure terms to Monsieur de Plouguern of some vague indefinite event which was very slowly approaching consummation. The senator seemed to be making mental combinations and calculations with the absorbed air of a chess-player, but he shook his head as though he could come to no satisfactory conclusion. On the few occasions when Rougon came to see her, Clorinde affected great weariness and spoke of going to Italy for three months. Then she would close her eyelids and examine him with a gleaming glance, while a smile of refined cruelty hardened her lips. She would have liked to try and strangle him then and there with her tapering fingers, but she was anxious that when she did make her attack it should prove quite effective ; and this long waiting for the time when her nails would be fully grown was not without a spice of sweet pleasure to her. Rougon, who was always greatly preoccupied, shook hands with her mechanically and never noticed the nervous fever of her flesh. He fancied that she had given up her eccentricities, and he complimented her upon rendering obedience to her husband.

“ You are now nearly all that I wished you to be,” he said to her. “ You have taken the right course. Women ought to remain quietly in their own houses.”

“ Good heavens ! what an idiot he is ! ” she used to exclaim with a shrill laugh when he had gone away. “ And he thinks that it is the women who are all idiots ! ”

One Sunday evening towards ten o’clock, when the coterie of friends had assembled in Clorinde’s bedroom, Monsieur de Plouguern made his appearance with a face beaming with triumph.

“ Well,” he said, trying to appear extremely indignant, “ have you heard of Rougon’s last performance ? This time, surely, the measure is full ! ”

They all eagerly clustered round him. No one had heard of the matter to which he was referring.

"It is abominable!" he cried, excitedly. "It is inconceivable how a minister could sink to such depths!"

Then he entered into particulars. When the Charbonnels had gone to Faverolles to take possession of their cousin Chevassu's property, they had made a great out-cry about the alleged disappearance of a large quantity of silver plate. They accused the woman who had been left in charge of the house, a very pious person, of having stolen it. They asserted that this miserable woman, upon learning about the judgment delivered by the Council of State, had conspired with the Sisters of the Holy Family and had carried off to the convent all the valuables that could easily be concealed. Three days later the Charbonnels dropped their accusations against the housekeeper and charged the Sisters themselves with having ransacked their house. This caused a terrible scandal in the town. The commissary of police had refused to grant a warrant to have the convent searched, and thereupon Rougon, after merely receiving a letter from the Charbonnels, had telegraphed to the prefect directing him to order a strict perquisition at once.

"Yes, a strict perquisition, those were the words in the message," Monsieur Plouguern said in conclusion. "Then came the painful spectacle of the commissary and two gendarmes ransacking the convent. They were there for five hours. The gendarmes insisted upon poking into every corner. Just imagine, they even examined the Sisters' beds!"

"The Sisters' beds! Oh! it is abominable!" cried Madame Bouchard, in disgust.

"He must be entirely destitute of the slightest idea of religion!" the colonel declared.

"Well, what can you expect?" asked Madame Correur. "Rougon has never conformed with the requirements of faith. I have often tried to reconcile him with God, but I have always utterly failed in my efforts."

Monsieur Bouchard and Monsieur Béjuin shook their heads in a hopeless sort of way, as though they had just heard of some frightful social catastrophe which made them despair of humanity.

"Of course they discovered nothing in the convent?" exclaimed Monsieur Kahn, energetically rubbing his fringe of beard.

"Absolutely nothing!" replied Monsieur de Plouguern.

Then he continued rapidly :

“A silver sauce-pan, I think, two cups, and a cruet-stand, mere trifles, presents which the esteemed deceased, an old man of extreme piety, had given to the Sisters in acknowledgment of their kind attention to him during his long illness.”

“Yes, yes, of course !” said the others.

The senator said no more on the subject ; but he resumed in a very deliberate way, accentuating each sentence by bringing one hand down upon the other :

“That, however, is not the important point. The question is one of the respect due to a convent, to one of those holy houses where the virtues which have been driven out from our impious society have taken refuge. How is it possible to expect the masses to be religious when they see attacks made upon religion by those in such high positions ? Rougon has been guilty of utter sacrilege in this matter, and he will be called to account for it. All the decent-minded folks in Faverolles are bursting with indignation. Monseigneur Rochart, the wellknown bishop, who has always manifested a particular affection for the Sisters, at once set off for Paris, where he has come to demand justice. In the Senate, too, to-day a great deal of annoyance was shown, and there was some talk of raising a discussion upon the few details which I was able to supply. And by the way the Empress herself—”

Every head was eagerly now craned forward.

“Yes, the Empress has learnt this deplorable story from Madame de Llorentz, who heard it from our friend La Rouquette, to whom I myself told it. When she heard it Her Majesty exclaimed : ‘Rougon is no longer worthy of speaking in the name of France !’”

“Quite right !” said every one.

On this Thursday evening up till one o’clock nothing else was talked of. Clorinde had not opened her mouth. At Monsieur Plouguern’s first words she had lain back on her lounging-chair, looking a little pale and compressing her lips. Then she quickly crossed herself three times without any one seeing her, as though she were thanking heaven for having at last granted her a long-sought favour. The narrative of the perquisition wrung from her various gestures expressive of outraged piety, and she gradually flushed quite red. Then, gazing up towards the dim ceiling she became absorbed in a deep reverie as to the probable outcome of this affair.

While the rest of the friends were discussing the matter, Monsieur de Plouguern glided up to Clorinde and laid one of his hands upon her bosom with a familiar gesture. Then, with his sceptical snigger and in the easy manner of a nobleman who has mixed in all kinds of society, he whispered into the young woman's ear:

“He has insulted God Almighty! He is mad!”

CHAPTER XIII.

DURING the next week, Rougon became conscious of increasing indignation stirring up against him. Everything else might have been forgiven, his abuse of power, the grasping greed of his band of friends, and the choking grip in which he held the whole country; but his sending gendarmes to poke about amongst the beds of the Sisters was so monstrous a crime that the ladies of the court affected to shudder when he passed them. Monseigneur Rochart was creating a terrible commotion throughout the official world, and it was said that he had even complained to the Empress herself on the subject. The scandal was vigorously kept alive by a few wily individuals, who so worked the matter that similar complaints were raised at once in every quarter with extraordinary unanimity. In the midst of all these furious attacks, however, Rougon maintained a perfectly serene and smiling demeanour. He shrugged his broad shoulders and spoke scoffingly of the whole matter. He even joked about it. At an evening reception at the Minister of Justice, he said: "By the way, I never told you that they found a priest in one of the Sisters' beds." When this sally of his was circulated, there was a fresh outburst of anger, and the minister's insulting impiety seemed to have now reached a point beyond which it was impossible to go. Then, at last, Rougon began to grow angry. They were making him quite sick with all their talk, he said. The Sisters were certainly thieves, he asserted, for silver cups and plate had been discovered in their possession. He showed a strong inclination, too, to take some further steps in the matter, and he made inquiries and threatened to overwhelm all the clergy of Faveroles with confusion in the courts of justice.

Early one morning, however, the Charbonnels were announced at his house. Rougon felt astonished, for he did not know that they were even in Paris. As soon as he saw them, he told them that matters were proceeding most satisfactorily, and that he had already sent instructions to the prefect to compel the

public prosecutor to take active steps. Monsieur Charbonnel, however, assumed an expression of consternation upon hearing this.

"No, no! that will never do!" Madame Charbonnel exclaimed. "You have gone too far, Monsieur Rougon. You have quite misunderstood us."

Then they both began to sing the praises of the Sisters of the Holy Family. They were extremely good women, they said; and though they themselves had certainly ventured for a moment to go to law against them, they had never gone so far as to accuse them of base actions. Such a charge would have produced the greatest amazement in Faverolles, where everyone held the Sisters in such high esteem.

"You will do us the greatest injury, Monsieur Rougon," Madame Charbonnel said, in conclusion, "if you continue to show this violence towards religion. We have come to beg of you to desist from further action. Down over yonder, they don't understand the real state of affairs, and they think that it is we who are hounding you on; so, if you don't stop, they will end by stoning us. We have made a handsome present to the convent, an ivory Christ, which used to hang at the foot of our poor cousin's bed."

"Well, we've warned you now," added Monsieur Charbonnel, "and the responsibility rests with you. We have nothing further to do with the business."

Rougon let them talk on. They seemed to be very much displeased with him, and they gradually raised their voices in indignation. The minister felt a slight chilly tremor, and he looked at them, suddenly overcome with weary lassitude, and feeling as though some portion of his strength had again been ravished from him. However, he made no attempt to discuss the subject, but dismissed his visitors, promising them that he would take no further steps in the affair; and, indeed, he did let the whole matter die out.

During the last few days, his name had also been indirectly mixed up in another scandal. A frightful tragedy had taken place at Coulonges. Du Poizat, obstinately intent upon getting the better of his father, had gone one morning and knocked again at the old miser's door. Five minutes afterwards, the neighbours heard the sound of gun-shots in the house, accompanied by fearful cries. When they made their way inside, they found the old man lying at the foot of the staircase with

his head split open. There were two discharged guns lying on the floor of the lobby, and Du Poizat told them with a perfectly livid face that his father, upon seeing him advance towards the staircase, had suddenly begun to cry out "thieves!" as though he had gone mad, and had then fired upon him twice, almost touching him with the muzzle of his gun. He showed them a bullet-hole in his hat. Then, he said, as his father was advancing still nearer to him, he fell and broke his skull against the edge of the bottom step. This tragical death, mysterious and unwitnessed, gave rise to the most unpleasant reports throughout the whole of the department. The surgeons said that it was quite clear that the old man had had a fatal attack of apoplexy. The prefect's enemies, however, were in no way deterred by this from insinuating that he had given his father a push, and the number of his enemies increased every day, owing to the manner in which he held Niort crushed down as beneath a reign of terror. Du Poizat, with his teeth clenched and his hands twitching like a sickly child, now went about with a stern, pale face, checking the gossips on their door-steps with a single glance from his grey eyes as he passed along.

He had another unpleasant matter to contend against. He had been obliged to remove Gilquin, who had compromised himself in taking a bribe to procure a conscript exemption from the service. He had promised that a peasant's son should be exempted on his being paid a hundred francs. All that Du Poizat could do was to save Gilquin from prosecution and then disown him. Up to the present time, Du Poizat had relied entirely upon Rougon and he tried to make him more and more responsible for every matter that went wrong. He now probably had some idea of the minister's critical position, for he went up to Paris without giving him any intimation of his intention to do so. He was feeling very much shaken himself, and, fearing the collapse of the power in ruining which he had been chiefly instrumental, he was already on the look-out for some influential hand which could seat him firmly again. He contemplated asking for permission to change his prefecture in order to escape being certainly dismissed from office. After his father's death and Gilquin's knavery, Niort was becoming quite impossible for him.

"I just met Monsieur Du Poizat in the Faubourg Saint Honoré a yard or two away," Clorinde said, mischievously, to the

minister one day. "Aren't you good friends now? He seems very bitter against you."

Rougon avoided making any reply. After having been compelled to refuse several favours to the prefect, he had been conscious of an increasing coldness growing up between them, and they now confined themselves to simply official communications. The desertion was becoming general. Madame Correur herself had abandoned him. On certain evenings he again experienced that feeling of loneliness which he had formerly felt in the Rue Marbeuf when his coterie of friends were doubting him. At the close of his busily occupied days, and in the midst of the crowd of visitors who besieged his drawing-room, he felt himself alone and lost and heart-broken. His old familiar friends were not there. He once more began to feel an overwhelming need and craving for the continuous praises of the colonel and Monsieur Bouchard, and of all the vitalizing warmth with which his little court had been used to surround him. He even regretted Monsieur Béjuin's silence. Then he made an attempt to win his old associates back again. He showed himself very pleasant and amiable towards them, wrote to them and even risked calling upon them. But the links were broken, and he could never succeed in getting them all around him. If he contrived to piece up the links at one end of the chain, some mischance kept those at the other end broken, it remained imperfect in spite of all his endeavours, and he always found himself without some of his old friends. At last they all abandoned him. This was the death-agony of his power. He, strong as he was, was bound to these poor foolish weaklings by the long labour of their common fortune; and, as each one deserted him, a piece of his being seemed to be ravished from him. His strength and abilities remained useless to him in this lessening of his importance, and his great fists only struck the empty air. On the day when his shadow stood alone in the sunshine and when he could no longer revel in the abuse of his power and patronage, it seemed to him that his glory had departed; and he began to dream of a new incarnation, a resurrection like some Jupiter Tonans, with no band of suppliant friends at his feet, but making his simple word a law to the people.

Rougon, however, did not yet feel that his position was seriously threatened. He treated with disdain the bites that scarcely touched his heels. He went on governing with stern

decision, unpopular and solitary. His great reliance was on the Emperor. His only weakness was his credulity. Every time that he saw His Majesty, he found him kindly disposed and amiable, still preserving his impenetrable smile; and the Emperor renewed his expressions of confidence in him, and repeated the instructions which he had so frequently given before. This seemed quite sufficient to Rougon. His Sovereign could certainly have no thought of sacrificing him. This feeling of certainty led him on to venturing upon a deep stroke of policy. To silence his enemies and to put his authority on a firm footing, he sent in his resignation couched in the most dignified terms. He spoke of the complaints which were being circulated against him, asserted that he had strictly obeyed the Emperor's commands and said he felt the need of his undoubted approval before further continuing his labours for the public weal. Then he undisguisingly confessed his own inclination to a stern policy and advocated the continuance of a strongly repressive administration. The court was at Fontainbleau at that time. The resignation was despatched, and Rougon awaited the result with all the confidence of a player sure of his own skill. All the late scandals, the tragedy at Coulonges, the domiciliary visit to the Sisters of the Holy Family, were going to be blotted out, he thought. If, however, on the other hand, he was really to fall, he wished to fall boldly like the strong man he was.

On the day on which the fate of the Minister was to be decided, a bazaar was being held in the Orangery at the Tuilleries in support of a charity under the Empress's patronage. All the palace circle and the high officials would be there out of respect to their Majesties. Rougon resolved that he also would go and show a perfectly unruffled face. It was quite a piece of bravado, this idea of boldly confronting a crowd of people who cast furtive sidelong glances at him, and thus exhibiting his contemptuous unconcern in the midst of their buzzing whispers. Towards three o'clock he was giving a final order to his chief subordinate, when his valet came to tell him that a lady and gentleman were most anxiously waiting to see him in his private rooms. The card which he brought bore the names of the Marquis and Marchioness d'Escorailles.

The two old people, whom the valet, deceived by their almost shabby appearance, had left in the dining-room, rose ceremoniously. Rougon hastened to lead them into the drawing-room,

feeling both emotion at their presence and a thrill of disquietude. He spoke of their unexpected arrival in Paris, and he tried to appear as pleasant and amiable as possible. The marquis and his wife, however, remained cold and stiff and reserved.

“Monsieur,” said the marquis at length, “you will excuse, I hope, the step we have considered it necessary to take. It concerns our son Jules. We wish him to retire from the administration, and we do not ask you to keep him any longer about you.”

Then, as the minister looked at him with an air of extreme surprise, he added :

“Young people are not to be depended upon. We have twice written to Jules telling him our reasons, and desiring him to send in his resignation. As he has not obeyed our instructions, we have at last determined to come ourselves. This is the second time, monsieur, that we have come to Paris in thirty years.”

Then Rougon began to protest. Jules, he said, had the most promising future before him. They were going to ruin his career. But the marchioness, as he spoke, broke out into gestures of impatience, and she began to explain her reasons with more animation than her husband had shown.

“It is not for us, Monsieur Rougon,” she said, “to judge you ; but there are certain traditions in our family. Jules can never be mixed up in an abominable persecution of the Church. Everyone at Plassans is quite amazed already. We should embroil ourselves with the whole nobility of the neighbourhood.”

Rougon had understood at once what was amiss. He was going to reply, but the marchioness silenced him with an imperious gesture.

“Let me finish !” she said. “Our son has taken service under you in spite of our protests. You know what grief we felt at seeing him take office under an illegitimate government. It was all I could do to keep his father from cursing him. Our house has been in mourning ever since, and when we receive our friends, the name of our son is never mentioned. We had sworn that we would trouble ourselves with him no longer ; but there are limits to everything, and it is intolerable that an Escorailles should be mixed up with the enemies of our holy faith. You understand me, do you not, monsieur ?”

Rougon bowed. He did not even think of smiling at the old lady's pious fibs. Once more the marquis and marchioness stood before him, proud and haughty and disdainful, as they had done in the old days when he prowled about the streets of Plassans pinched with hunger. If anyone else had used such language towards him, he would certainly have had them shown out at once. But now he felt wounded and distressed and shrunk. He again thought of his youth of sordid poverty, and for a moment he could almost have fancied that he was wearing his old worn-down shoes once more.

He promised that he would use his influence with Jules to make him conform with his parents' wishes; and then he merely added, alluding to the reply which he was awaiting from the Emperor :

“ It is quite possible, madame, that your son will be restored to you this very evening.”

When he was alone again, Rougon felt a thrill of fear. The old couple had succeeded in disturbing his hitherto unruffled placidity. He now hesitated about going to the bazaar where all eyes would read the expression of trouble upon his face. He felt ashamed, however, of his childish fear, and he passed through his study on his way out. He asked Merle if anything had come for him.

“ No, your excellency,” respectfully replied the usher, who had been on the look-out all the morning.

The Orangery at the Tuileries, where the bazaar was being held, had been sumptuously decorated for the occasion. Crimson velvet hangings with fringes of gold concealed the walls and transformed the great bare gallery into a noble gala hall. At one end, the left, an immense curtain, also of crimson velvet, was stretched across the gallery, cutting off a portion of it. This curtain was looped up with bands ornamented with huge golden tassels and afforded free communication between the great hall, along the sides of which the stalls were arranged, and the smaller division where a refreshment counter had been fitted up. The floor was strewn with fine sand. In each corner were majolica pots containing rare plants. In the middle of the square formed by the stalls, there was a low circular velvet settee, with a very sloping back; and in the centre of this circular settee a huge column of flowers shot up, a pillar of stems amongst which hung roses, carnations and verbenas, like a rain of gleaming drops. On the terrace near

the fountains, in front of the folding glass-doors, which were thrown widely open, servants in black livery glanced with a serious expression at the cards of those who had been invited.

The lady patronesses did not expect many people before four o'clock. They were standing behind their stalls in the great hall waiting for their customers to arrive. Their wares were spread out on long tables covered with crimson cloth. There were several stalls of Parisian and Chinese fancy goods ; two of children's toys ; a flower-stall crammed with roses ; and, lastly, inside a tent there was a lucky-wheel, like those to be seen at country fairs. The stall-holders, in low-necked ball dresses, assumed all the persuasive graces of artful shopkeepers and the seductive smiles of *modistes* trying to palm off old-fashioned goods, while they modulated their voices alluringly, and prattled and puffed their wares. They played the part of shop-girls to perfection and flirted and giggled and made themselves quite familiar with everyone who came to purchase of them. A princess presided over one of the toy stalls, and a marchioness was selling purses which had cost twenty-nine sous for twenty francs. These two were rivals and each depended upon her beauty for making the larger sum of money. They seized hold of customers, called out to the men, and asked the most shameless prices ; and then, after bargaining as greedily as thievish butchers, they would throw in a little bit of themselves, the tips of their fingers or a glimpse of their widely opened bodices, to turn the scale and complete the purchase. They made charity the excuse for all they did. The hall was now gradually filling. The men calmly stood and examined the stall-holders as though they formed a portion of the goods for sale. Fashionably dressed young fellows were crowding round certain of the stalls, laughing and even venturing on risky remarks about their purchases ; while the lady-sellers flitted about from one to another with inexhaustible complacence, and offered their wares to all with the same charming expression. It was quite an enjoyment to them to play the shop-girl for four hours. Sales by auction could be heard proceeding, interrupted by joyous peals of laughter, amid the trampling of feet over the sanded floor. The crimson hangings toned down the bright light which streamed in through the lofty windows, and imparted to it a reddish hue which lighted up the ladies' naked shoulders with a rosy tinge. In the space between the stalls, six ladies with light baskets hung from their

necks were threading their way amongst the public, darting upon each new comer and crying out cigars and matches. These six consisted of a baroness, two bankers' daughters and the wives of three high functionaries.

Madame de Combefot met with especial success. She presided over the flower-stall, and sat in a high seat in the rose-crammed kiosk, a carved and gilded affair which looked like a great pigeon-cote. She was dressed entirely in rose herself, in a tight-fitting rose dress that seemed to carry her nudity even beyond her low cut corsage. Between her breasts she wore nothing but the regulation bunch of violets. To make herself as much like a genuine flower-girl as possible, she tied up her bouquets in public, twisting up together a full-blown rose, a bud, and three leaves, and holding the wire between her teeth. These bouquets she sold for from one to ten louis, according to the appearance of her customers. They were in such demand that she could not manufacture them quickly enough, and every now and then she pricked herself in her haste and quickly sucked the blood from her fingers.

Opposite to her, in the canvas tent, pretty Madame Bouchard was presiding over the lucky-wheel. She was wearing a charming blue peasant-costume. It had a high waist and fitted her loosely; indeed it almost disguised her, giving her quite the appearance of a vendor of cakes and gingerbread. She affected a pretty lisp and an air of the most complete guilelessness. Over the lucky-wheel were displayed the different prizes; hideous trinkets costing four or five sous apiece, fancy articles in leather and glass and china. Every few moments, when there was a lack of patrons, Madame Bouchard called out in her pretty innocent voice :

“ Try your luck, gentlemen ! Only twenty sous a time ! Try your luck, gentlemen ! ”

The refreshment room, which, like the larger hall, had its floor sanded and its corners decorated with rare plants, was furnished with little round tables and cane-seated chairs. It had been made to resemble a *café* as much as possible. At one end, behind a massive counter, three ladies were fanning themselves as they waited for orders. In front of them was spread out a showy display of decanters, plates of cakes and sandwiches, sweetmeats, and cigars and cigarettes. Every few moments the lady in the middle, a dark and petulant countess, rose and bent forward to pour out a glass of something, look-

ing, scarcely recognisable in the midst of all these decanters and bottles, as she dashed her naked arms about at the imminent risk of breaking everything. It was Clorinde, however, who was the queen of the buffet. It was she who handed to the customers the refreshments they had ordered, as they sat at the little tables. She looked like Juno masquerading as a waiting-maid. She wore a yellow satin robe slashed slant-wise with black, and she presented a dazzling and wonderful appearance, like a blazing star with a comet's tail sweeping after it. Her dress was cut very low, leaving her bust quite free; and she sailed about majestically amidst the cane-seated chairs, carrying her glasses on a pewter tray with all the serenity of a goddess. Her bare elbows brushed against the men's shoulders, and her bosom showed conspicuously as she bent down to take orders. She exhibited no appearance of haste, but answered everyone with a smile and seemed perfectly at her ease. When the refreshments were consumed, she received in her queenly hand the silver and copper money tendered in payment, and threw with a gesture that had already become familiar to her into a bag which was slung round her waist.

Monsieur Kahn and Monsieur Béjin now came in and sat down. The former knocked on the surface of the zinc table, and cried jocosely :

“ Two glasses of beer, madame.”

Clorinde hastened up and served the two glasses of beer, and then remained standing near the table for a moment, to snatch a little rest, as the room just then happened to be almost free from customers. She began abstractedly wiping her fingers with her lace handkerchief, some beer having trickled over them. Monsieur Kahn noticed the peculiar brightness of her eyes and the expression of triumph with which her whole face shone. He looked at her with blinking eyes.

“ When did you get back from Fontainbleau ? ” he asked her.

“ This morning,” she replied.

“ You've seen the Emperor, I suppose ? Well, what is the news ? ”

Clorinde smiled and compressed her lips in a peculiar fashion, and then looked, in her turn, at Monsieur Kahn. The latter now noticed that she was wearing a somewhat eccentric ornament which he had never seen before. Above her naked shoulders and round her bare neck there was a dog-collar ; a real dog-collar of

black velvet, with buckle, ring and bell. The bell was of gold and a beautiful pearl tinkled inside it. Upon the collar there were two names in oddly twisted and interlaced letters of diamonds. Hanging down from the ring a thick gold chain fell over her bosom between her breasts, and was then looped up again and attached to a gold plate fastened to her right arm, on which were these words: *I belong to my master.*

“Is that a present?” Monsieur Kahn said, softly, pointing to the ornament.

Clorinde nodded assent, still keeping her lips compressed with a cunning, sensual expression. She had desired this servitude and she paraded it with a shameless serenity, which seemed to elevate her above mere common-place sin, honoured by a sovereign’s choice and an object of envy to every woman. When she had made her appearance with this collar round her neck, on which the keen eyes of rivals fancied they could decipher an illustrious name interlaced with her own, every woman there had understood matters at once, and had exchanged glances with one another which plainly said, “It has come off at last!” For the last month past, all the official world had been talking of the matter and waiting for the issue of it. It was clearly settled now, that was evident. Clorinde herself was proclaiming it, and was carrying the information about fixed to her shoulder. If any credence was to be attached to the stories which were whispered about from ear to ear, her first strange bed had been a bundle of straw, on which she had slept, at fifteen years of age, with a coachman. Afterwards, she had lain in other beds, but always rising in the social scale, the beds of bankers, functionaries and ministers, her fortune increasing with each successive night. She had gone on from bed to bed, stage by stage, as in an apotheosis, ever looking forward to satisfying her highest aim and pride till she had at last laid her lovely, passionless head upon the pillow of the Emperor himself.

“A glass of beer, madame, please,” said a fat gentleman wearing a decoration, a general, as he looked at her smilingly.

When she brought the beer, two deputies asked her for two glasses of Chartreuse. A crowd of people were pouring into the room, and orders were being given on all sides for spirits, aniseed, lemonade, biscuits and cigars. The men stared at Clorinde and whispered together, excited by the indelicate stories which were circulated about her. When this waiting-

maid, fresh that morning from the arms of the Emperor, held out her hand to take their money, they seemed to be sniffing and trying to discover in her some trace of the imperial amours. The young woman serenely turned her neck and showed her dog-collar, the heavy gold chain of which moved with a tinkling sound. That she had just been a queen for the night probably gave an additional piquancy to her present assumption of the part of a waiting-maid at everyone's beck and call, dragging about over the floor of the mock café, amongst the pieces of lemon-peel and the biscuit-crumbs, the statuesque feet which had so recently been passionately kissed by august moustaches.

“It’s really quite amusing,” the young woman said, as she came back and stood by Monsieur Kahn. “I do believe they take me for a common girl! One of them actually gave me a pinch just now! But I didn’t say anything. What would have been the good? It’s all for the sake of the poor, isn’t it?”

Monsieur Kahn motioned to her to stoop down, and, when she did so, he whispered very softly.

“Well, about Rougon?” he asked.

“Hush! You’ll know everything directly,” she replied, in equally low tones. “I have sent him an invitation card, and I am expecting his arrival.”

Then, as Monsieur Kahn nodded his head, she added, with animation :

“Yes, yes, I know him, and I’m sure he will come. And, besides, he knows nothing of what has happened.”

Monsieur Kahn and Monsieur Béjuin now began to look out anxiously for Rougon’s appearance. They could see the whole of the large hall through the opening in the curtains. The crowd there was increasing every minute. Upon the circular settee there were several men lounging back, with their knees crossed and their eyes closed sleepily, while a continual flow of visitors brushed their legs as they streamed round them. The heat was becoming excessive; and the buzzing murmur of voices was growing ever louder in the roseate haze that floated over the black hats of the men. Every few moments, the grating, rattling sound of the lucky-wheel could be heard.

Madame Correur, who had just arrived, was going slowly round the stalls. She was looking very fat, and was wearing a white and mauve striped grenadine dress, from beneath which her plump shoulders and arms burst into view like rosy

cushions. There was a shrewd expression on her face, and she seemed to be looking about her with the intention of making some advantageous bargain. There were generally plenty of such to be made, she said, at these charitable bazaars, for the ladies very often did not know the value of their wares. She never bought anything, she added, of such stall-holders as were friends of her own, for they always tried to take advantage of her. When she had been all round the hall, moving the different wares about, examining them and putting them back in their places again, she went back to a stall upon which some fancy articles in leather were exposed for sale, where she remained for fully ten minutes turning over the different things with an air of doubt and perplexity. At last, she carelessly took up a portfolio of Russian leather, at which she had been glancing for the last quarter of an hour.

“How much?” she asked.

The stall-holder, a tall, fair, young woman, who was joking with two gentlemen, scarcely turned round, as she replied :

“Fifteen francs.”

The portfolio was worth at least twenty. These ladies, who contended with each other in wresting extravagant prices from the men, generally sold their goods to those of their own sex at cost-price, actuated by a sort of free-masonry. Madame Correur, however, put the portfolio down on the stall again, with a kind of alarmed expression.

“Oh, it is too expensive,” she said. “I want something for a present, but I don’t wish to give more than ten francs. Have you got anything nice for ten francs?”

Then she began to turn all the goods over again. Nothing, however, seemed to suit her. What a pity it was that the portfolio was so dear. She took it up again and pushed her nose into the pockets. The stall-holder, growing impatient, at last offered to sell it to her for fourteen francs, and then for twelve. That was still too much, however, Madame Correur said; and, after much keen bargaining, she succeeded in getting it for eleven.

“I prefer selling the things, if I can,” said the tall young woman. “All the ladies bargain and not one of them buys anything. If it weren’t for the gentlemen, I don’t know what we should do!”

As Madame Correur went away she had the satisfaction of finding inside the portfolio a ticket denoting that the price was

twenty-five francs. Then she began to stroll about the hall again and finally went and stood behind the lucky-wheel at Madame Bouchard's side.

"Ah ! here comes the colonel !" exclaimed Monsieur Kahn, who was still sitting in the refreshment-room with his eyes fixed upon the entrance.

The colonel had come because he could not very well help doing so. He hoped he would get off with the expenditure of a louis, but the thought of even that was already making his heart bleed. As soon as he made his appearance he was surrounded and attacked by three or four ladies.

"Buy a cigar of me, monsieur ! Buy a box of matches, monsieur !" they cried.

The colonel smiled and politely extricated himself from them. Then he looked round him and came to the conclusion that he had better spend his money at once. He went up to a stall presided over by a lady high in favour at court, of whom he asked the price of a very ugly cigar-case. Seventy-five francs ! The colonel could not suppress a movement of alarm and he dropped the cigar-case and hurriedly escaped. The lady, flushing red and feeling offended, turned her head away as though he had been guilty of some impropriety in her presence. Then the colonel, desirous of preventing any unpleasant comments about himself, went up to the kiosk where Madame de Combelot was still manufacturing her little bouquets. These, at any rate, could not be very expensive, he thought. But he would not even venture upon the purchase of a bouquet, for he felt sure that Madame de Combelot would put a high price upon her handiwork ; and he chose out from amongst the heap of roses a cankered bud, the poorest and most insignificant he could see.

"What is the price of this flower, madame ?" he then asked, with a great show of politeness, as he took out his purse.

"A hundred francs, monsieur," replied the lady, who had been watching his manœuvrings out of the corner of her eye.

The colonel began to stammer, and his hands trembled. This time, however, he felt that retreat was impossible. There were several people watching him. So he reluctantly paid his money and then escaped into the refreshment-room.

"It is an abominable swindle, an abominable swindle !" he muttered, as he took a seat at Monsieur Kahn's table.

"You haven't seen anything of Rougon in the hall, have you ?" Monsieur Kahn asked him.

The colonel made no reply. He was casting furious side-long glances at the stall-holders. Then, when he heard Monsieur d'Escorailles and Monsieur La Rouquette laughing loudly in front of one of the stalls, he ground out from between his teeth :

“ Ah ! it's all very well for those young fellows ! They always manage to get something for their money in the end ! ”

Monsieur d'Escorailles and Monsieur La Rouquette certainly seemed to be deriving great amusement from something or other. The ladies at the stalls were struggling amongst themselves to get possession of them. As soon as ever they had made their appearance, all hands beckoned to them and their names were called out on all sides.

“ Monsieur d'Escorailles, you know that you promised me—”
“ Now, Monsieur La Rouquette, do buy this little horse of me ! No ? Well, you shall buy a doll, then ! Yes, a doll ; a doll's exactly what you want ! ”

The two young men were holding on to each other's arms, for mutual protection as they said playfully. They advanced radiant and beaming through the attacking battalion of petticoats, greeted with a caressing chorus of sweet voices. Every now and then they disappeared in the midst of the flood of bare shoulders, against which they pretended to defend themselves with little cries of alarm. At every stall they allowed themselves to be agreeably plundered. Then they began to affect a close niggardliness and assumed the most comical expressions of disgusted surprise. What ! a louis for a doll that wasn't worth more than a sou ! Oh, that was quite beyond their means ! Two louis for three pencils ! What ! did the ladies want to reduce them to beggary ? The ladies were immensely amused and their pretty rippling laughter broke out in flute-like strains. They grew keener than ever, quite intoxicated by this shower of gold, and trebled and quadrupled their prices in their craving after plunder. They passed the young men on from stall to stall, and such phrases as “ I'll squeeze them well ! ” and “ Just you see if I don't get something nice out of them ! ” could be heard being bandied about ; remarks which the two young men heard and acknowledged with playful bows. Behind them the ladies were triumphing and boasting one to the other. The most enthusiastic and most self-satisfied was a girl of eighteen, who had sold a stick of sealing-wax for three louis. When at last the young men reached the end of the hall and a lady insisted

upon forcing a box of soap into Monsieur d'Escorailles' pocket, he shook his purse before her face.

"I haven't a copper left. Shall I give you a bill for the money?" he exclaimed.

The lady eagerly sprang forward and took the purse and searched it. Then she looked at the young man and it appeared as though she were on the point of asking him for his watch and chain.

This was a trick. Monsieur d'Escorailles always took an empty purse with him to bazaars by way of amusement.

"Come, let's be off!" he said, dragging Monsieur La Rouquette away with him. "I am quite done up with it all. We must go and recruit ourselves."

"Try your luck, gentlemen! Twenty sous a chance!" Madame Bouchard called out as they passed in front of the lucky-wheel.

They went up to her, pretending not to have heard what she said.

"How much do you charge?" they asked.

Then the peals of laughter began again. Madame Bouchard in her blue dress, however, preserved her expression of utter innocence and appeared as though she had never seen the young men before. They went into the business enthusiastically. For a whole quarter of an hour the lucky-wheel was kept going without any cessation. They took it in turns to spin it. Monsieur d'Escorailles won two dozen egg-cups, three little looking-glasses, seven china figures, and five cigarette-cases. Monsieur La Rouquette's winnings consisted of two packets of lace, a china tray mounted upon feet of gilt zinc, some glasses, a flat candle-stick, and a box with a mirror inside it.

"Ah, we'll stop now; you're too lucky! I won't let you go on any longer!" Madame Bouchard cried at last, compressing her lips. "Go away with your winnings."

She had piled them up in two great heaps on a table by her side. Monsieur La Rouquette seemed filled with consternation at the sight of them. He asked Madame Bouchard to give him the regulation bunch of violets which she was wearing in her hair in exchange for his share. But she declined to do so.

"No, no; you've won these things, haven't you? Very well, then, take them away with you."

"Madame is quite right," said Monsieur d'Escorailles, gravely.

"We mustn't despise fortune, and I'll not leave a single egg-cup behind me. Oh dear! I'm quite exhausted!"

He spread out his handkerchief and tied his winnings up in a neat bundle. This caused a fresh burst of merriment. Monsieur La Rouquette's embarrassment was equally productive of amusement. Madame Correur, who had hitherto kept in the background of the tent with a smiling matronly dignity, now came forward with her rosy face. She would be very glad, she said, to make an exchange.

"Oh, no, I don't want anything!" the young deputy hastily exclaimed. "Take the whole lot; I make you a present of everything."

They did not, however, take themselves off at once, but they remained where they were for a little time longer. They now began to pay whispered compliments in doubtful taste to Madame Bouchard. The sight of her, they told her, made the men's heads turn round much faster than her lucky wheel did. There wasn't much to be won at her wheel, they said; it wasn't half such a good game as forfeits, and they offered to play her at forfeits for all sorts of merry stakes, Madame Bouchard drooped her eyelashes with a giggle, and assumed the air of a peasant-girl chaffed by gentlemen. Madame Correur kept her eyes fixed upon her in admiration.

"Isn't she sweet? Isn't she sweet?" she exclaimed every now and then, with a rapturous expression.

Madame Bouchard at last began to rap Monsieur d'Escorailles' fingers as he tried to examine the mechanism of the lucky-wheel, alleging that it did not work fairly. Would they never leave her at peace? she cried. When she at length succeeded in getting rid of them, she resumed her pretty requests for patronage.

"Only twenty sous a spin, gentlemen. Come and try just one spin!"

Just at this moment Monsieur Kahn, who had stood up so that he might be able to see over the heads of the crowd, hastily sat down again.

"Here's Rougon coming! Let's pretend not to see him."

Rougon made his way slowly up the hall. He stopped at Madame Bouchard's tent, and tried his fortune at the lucky-wheel. Then he went and bought a rose from Madame de Combelot for three louis. When he had in this way made his contribution to the funds of the charity, he seemed inclined to

take his departure at once. He blinked his eyes, and began to walk towards one of the doors. But after having glanced towards the refreshment room, he abruptly altered his course, and stepped in the direction of the buffet, with a serene and haughty mien. Monsieur d'Escorailles and Monsieur La Rouquette had now taken seats with Monsieur Kahn, Monsieur Béjuin, and the colonel. Monsieur Bouchard also came up and joined them. All these men trembled slightly as the minister passed by, so big and strong with those massive limbs of his did he seem to them. He greeted them familiarly in a loud distinct voice as he went past them. Then he seated himself at a neighbouring table. He kept his big face well raised, and turned it slowly round to the right and left as though anxious to confront unflinchingly the inquisitive and hostile glances which he felt were turned upon him.

Clorinde stepped up to him, sweeping her heavy yellow train majestically behind her.

“What will you take?” she asked him, affecting a vulgarity of manners not untinged with raillery.

“Ah, is that you?” he said, vivaciously. “I never drink anything, you know. What have you got?”

Clorinde rapidly went through the list; Champagne, rum, curaçoa, kirsch-water, chartreuse, vespéstro, and kummel.

“Oh, no, I won’t have any of those. Give me a glass of sugared-water.”

The young woman went off to the counter, and brought back with her the glass of sugared-water, still preserving her demeanour of goddess-like majesty. She stood in front of Rougon, watching him stir the sugar. The minister continued to smile, and began to utter the first common-place remarks that suggested themselves to him.

“You are very well, I hope. It is an age since I saw you.”

“I have been at Fontainebleau,” she replied, quietly.

Rougon raised his eyes, and fixed a searching glance upon the young woman. Then in her turn she began to question him.

“Are you feeling pretty satisfied now?” She asked him. “Is everything going on as you would wish it?”

“Yes, quite so,” the minister replied.

Clorinde was busying herself about him with all the attention of a professional waiter. She kept her maliciously flashing eyes fixed upon him, as though she were every moment going

to let an expression of triumph escape her. At last, however, she left him ; and, as she did so, she raised herself up on to the tips of her toes, and cast a glance into the adjoining hall. Then she touched Rougon's shoulder.

"There is some one looking for you, I believe," she said, with gleaming eyes.

Merle now made his appearance, and threaded his way respectfully through the chairs and tables in the refreshment-room. He made three bows, one after the other, and then he begged his excellency to excuse him, but the letter which his excellency had been expecting all the morning had arrived, and, as he had received no instructions, he had thought—

"All right ; give it to me," interrupted Rougon.

The usher handed him a large envelope, and then went off to prowl about the bazaar. Rougon had recognised the writing at a glance. It was an autograph letter from the Emperor in answer to the one proffering his resignation. A slight cold perspiration mounted to his brow ; but he showed no sign of pallor. He slipped the letter quietly into the inner pocket of his coat, without ceasing to meet the glances that were directed upon him from Monsieur Kahn's table. Clorinde had just gone and spoken a few words to the latter gentleman. All the group of friends were now keenly watching Rougon with feverish curiosity, and they did not lose one of his movements.

Clorinde now returned and stood in front of him again, while he drank off half of his glass of sugared-water, and thought of some compliment to address to the young woman.

"You are looking quite lovely to-day. If queens turn themselves into waiting-maids—"

"You haven't read your letter then ?" she said bluntly, cutting his compliment short.

He affected not to remember what she was speaking about. Then all at once he pretended to recollect.

"Oh, yes, this letter. I'll read it at once, if it will give you any pleasure."

He opened the envelope carefully with a penknife. He read the first fews lines at a glance. The Emperor accepted his resignation. For nearly a minute he kept the letter in front of his face as though he were reading it over again. He felt afraid lest he should not be able to maintain his calm and undisturbed expression. There was a terrible commotion going on within him. All his strength, unwilling to accept this overthrow, rose

up in rebellion and shook him fiercely to his very bones. If he had not sternly restrained himself, he would have cried out aloud, and smashed the table with his ponderous fists. With his eyes still fixed upon the letter, he saw in imagination the Emperor as he had actually seen him at Saint Cloud, with his soft words and ceaseless smile, expressing to him the continuance of his confidence, and confirming his previous instructions. What long hoarded plan of disgrace had the Sovereign been maturing behind that impenetrable expression of his, that he now so suddenly crushed him in a single night, after a score of times persisting in keeping him in office ?

At last, by a mighty effort, Rougon conquered his emotion. He raised his face again, and showed it perfectly unruffled. Then he put the letter back into his pocket with a careless gesture. Clorinde in the meantime had put both her hands upon the little table. She now stooped eagerly down towards Rougon with twitching lips.

“ I knew it all. I was there this morning, my poor friend ! ”

Then she went on to pity him, in a voice which was so cruelly mocking that he again looked keenly at her. But she had ceased to dissemble now. For months passed she had been looking forward to this triumph, and she spoke slowly and deliberately as though she wanted to taste the full sweetness of at last openly showing herself to him as his implacable and now avenged foe.

“ I have not been able to do anything in your defence ? ” she continued. “ You are doubtless not aware — ”

Then she checked herself.

“ Guess who succeeds you as Minister of the Interior, ” she resumed, with a bitter expression.

Rougon made a gesture expressive of indifference. Clorinde still kept her eyes fixed on him.

“ My husband ! ” she said, at last.

Rougon’s mouth was dry and parched, and he took a gulp of the sugared water. Clorinde had thrown into the two words she had last spoken the expression of all she felt, her anger at having been formerly despised, the feeling of revenge which she had so cleverly worked out, and her triumph as a woman in crushing a man who was credited with the highest abilities. Then she began to give herself a further pleasure by torturing him and abusing her victory. Indeed, she said, her husband wasn’t a very clever person. She confessed this freely enough, and even

joked about it. What she meant to convey was, that the first comer would have done equally as well, and that she would have made Merle into a minister if the whim had seized her. Yes, the usher Merle, or any weak-witted imbecile she had come across, it mattered not who it was. Anyone would have done to succeed Rougon. All this went to prove her feminine omnipotence. Then she assumed a motherly protecting air and began to pour out good advice.

"You see now, my friend, that you made a mistake, as I've often told you before, in despising women. Women are not the fools you imagine them to be. It used to make me quite angry to hear you speak of us as though we were a lot of idiots and mere cumbersome blockheads, mill-stones about your neck. Look at my husband now ! Have I been a mill-stone round his neck, do you think ? I have been looking forward to showing you a sight like this. I promised myself this satisfaction, as you may perhaps remember, on the day when we had a certain conversation together. Now I hope I have convinced you. I willingly allow, my friend, that you are a very clever fellow, but be quite sure of this, that a woman can always topple you over if she chooses to take the trouble."

Rougon, who had turned somewhat paler, smiled.

"Yes ; I daresay you are right," he said, in a low voice, calling to mind all that had gone before. "I had only my own native force to rely upon, you had—"

"I had something else ! yes, indeed, I had !" she interrupted, with a frankness which almost amounted to sublimity, to such an extent did she carry her contempt for the ordinary proprieties.

Rougon indulged in no recriminations. Clorinde had sucked his strength away from him to use it for his own overthrow, and she had applied to his own ruin the lessons which she had humbly learnt at his side during those pleasant afternoons in the Rue Marbeuf. He was now drinking the cup of ingratitude and treason ; but, like a man of experience, he did not let it be seen how bitter it was to him. What was preoccupying him more than anything else in the present revelation was a wonder as to whether he even now fully understood Clorinde. He thought of his former inquiries about her, and of his futile efforts to discover the secret workings of this majestic but perverted machine. The folly of men, he said to himself, was certainly very great.

Twice Clorinde had left him for a moment to serve other customers ; and, now that she had had her full satisfaction, she again began her stately perambulations amidst the tables, affecting to take no further notice of Rougon. He followed her with his eyes, and he saw her go up to a man with an immense beard, a foreigner, whose lavish prodigality was at that time quite exciting Paris. He was just finishing a glass of Malaga.

“ How much, madame ? ” he asked, getting up from his seat.

“ Five francs, monsieur. Everything is five francs a glass.”

He paid the money.

“ And a kiss, how much is that ? ” he continued, in the same tone with his foreign accent.

“ A hundred thousand francs,” Clorinde answered, without the slightest hesitation.

The foreigner sat down again, and wrote a few words on a page which he had torn out of a memorandum-book. Then he imprinted a smacking kiss on Clorinde’s cheek, paid for it, and went away in the calmest manner in the world. All the company in the café smiled and were much amused at the incident.

“ It’s only a matter of paying the price,” Clorinde murmured, going up towards Rougon again.

Rougon saw a fresh allusion in this remark. To him she had said “ Never ! ” This man of chaste life, who had borne without an appearance of flinching the stunning blow of his dismissal, now began to be keenly pained by the collar which Clorinde so impudently paraded. She stooped down and swayed her neck about as though to provoke him still further. The pearl tinkled in the golden bell ; the chain hung down still warm from the hands of the master ; and the diamonds flashed upon the velvet, on which Rougon could easily read the secret which was known to everybody. He had never before felt so keenly the bite of his unavowed jealousy, or that burning envy which he had sometimes experienced in the presence of the all-powerful Emperor. He felt that he would rather have seen Clorinde in the arms of that coachman about whom society whispered. It fanned and excited all his old desire to know that she was raised up far out of his reach, the slave of a man at whose word every head was bowed.

The young woman probably guessed the torment he was suffering, and she inflicted still another pang upon him. She

motioned towards Madame de Combélot selling her roses in the flower-stall.

"Poor Madame de Combélot!" she said, with a malicious laugh; "she is still waiting patiently on!"

Rougon finished his glass of sugared water. He felt as though he were choking.

"How much?" he stammered, taking out his purse.

"Five francs."

When she had tossed the coin into the bag, Clorinde held out her hand again.

"Aren't you going to give anything to the waiter?" she asked, playfully.

Rougon felt in his pocket and brought out a couple of sous, which he had put into Clorinde's hand. This insult was the only vengeance which his parvenu boorishness could think of. In spite of all her coolness, Clorinde blushed. But she quickly resumed her stately goddess-like demeanour.

"Thank you, your excellency," she said, with a bow, as she went away from him.

Rougon did not dare to get up on to his feet immediately. His legs felt nerveless, and he was afraid of tottering. He was anxious to go away as he had come, with a firm gait and undisturbed expression. He was feeling especially afraid of passing in front of his old friends and associates, whose straining ears and staring eyes had not lost a single point of what had taken place. He let his glance wander over the room for a few moments longer, feigning perfect indifference. He was thinking over what had happened. Another act of his political life had come to a conclusion. He had fallen, undermined and eaten-away and ruined by his band of friends. His heavy shoulders had broken down beneath the weight of the responsibilities and follies and improprieties which he had undertaken entirely on their account in his braggart craving to be a feared and generous chief. His mighty muscles only made his fall the more ignominious. The very conditions on which he possessed power, the fact of having behind him a crowd of greedy appetites whose longings he must satisfy and of maintaining his popularity with them by abusing his power, now made his fall merely a question of time. He was now pondering over the work which his band of friends had slowly but surely effected, as their sharp teeth had day by day nibbled away and undermined his authority. They had clustered eagerly around him, hung on

to his knees, then to his breast, and finally to his throat, and had choked him. They had availed themselves of him in every way. They had used his feet to climb with, his hands to plunder with, and his jaws to eat and masticate with. They had taken his body for their own, as it were, and used it for their own personal gratification and pleasure, indulging themselves in their every fancy without a thought for the morrow. And now to-day, when they had drained him dry and could hear the sounds that foreboded his coming fall, they had deserted and abandoned him like rats whose instinct tells them of the approaching collapse of the house, the foundations of which they have undermined. They were all sleek and flourishing, and were already fattening themselves upon some one else. Monsieur Kahn had just sold his railway from Niort to Angers to Monsieur de Marsy. A week later, the colonel would be gazetted to an appointment in the Imperial palaces. Monsieur Bouchard had received a formal promise that his favourite, the interesting Georges Duchesne, should be appointed assistant under-secretary as soon as Delestang entered upon his duties at the Office of the Interior. Madame Correur was rendered happy by the serious illness of Madame Martineau, and felt sure now of getting possession of the house at Coulonges, where, she said, she meant to retire and spend her money in doing good in the neighbourhood. Monsieur Béjuin was certain of receiving a visit at his cut-glass works from the Emperor towards the autumn; and, lastly, Monsieur d'Escorailles, after being seriously lectured by the marquis and marchioness, had rendered homage to Clorinde and won a sub-prefecture merely by his look of admiration as he saw her carrying round the glasses in the refreshment-room. As Rougon looked at his glutted and flourishing band of associates, he felt as though he had grown smaller, and that they had now attained to huge proportions, and were crushing him down beneath their weight. For some time longer he did not dare to get up from his seat, for fear he should see them smile if he tottered.

By degrees, however, he grew more collected and felt his firmness coming back to him, and he rose from his chair. He was pushing the little zinc table aside to give himself room to pass, when Delestang came into the room holding the Count de Marsy's arm. There was a very curious story in circulation about the latter. If certain whisperings were to be believed, he had gone to Fontainebleau the previous week, while Clorinde

was there, solely to facilitate the meetings of the young woman and the Emperor. It was his duty to entertain and amuse the Empress. No one, however, seemed to think this anything more than an interesting fact; such services as this, it appeared to be considered, were habitually rendered amongst men. Rougon, however, thought that he could see in it a piece of revenge on the part of the count, who had leagued himself with Clorinde to bring about his fall, turning against his successor in office the very arms which had been successfully employed against himself some months previously at Compiègne. No doubt he had had a deep purpose behind the scandalous affair with which he was credited. Since his return from Fontainebleau he had certainly kept perpetually with Delestang.

Monsieur Kahn, Monsieur Béjuin, the colonel, and the whole coterie received the new minister with open arms. His appointment would not be officially notified in the *Moniteur* till the following morning, when it would appear together with Rougon's resignation, but the decree was signed and they were at liberty to show their triumph. They greeted him with much vigorous handshaking and grinning and a buzzing of congratulations; indeed the presence of the crowd in the hall alone kept their enthusiasm within bounds. It was a gradual assumption of possession on the part of the band of friends who made a show of kissing his hands and feet before making his entire body their own. They already considered that he belonged to them. One of them was holding him by the right arm, another by the left; a third had grasped one of the buttons of his coat, while a fourth, standing behind him, was craning forward and breathing his laudations into the back of his neck. Delestang, holding his handsome head erect, manifested a demeanour of affable dignity, and presented an appearance of imposing but weak-minded stateliness, just like one of those travelling monarchs one sees depicted in official illustrations receiving gifts of bouquets from the wives of sub-prefects. As Rougon, very pale and stung to the quick by this apotheosis of mediocrity, looked at the group, he could not restrain a smile. He was now quite collected again.

"I always predicted that Delestang would rise high," he said with a subtle expression to the Count de Marsy, who had stepped up to him with outstretched hand.

The count replied by a slight twist of his lips full of a fine irony. He had felt much amusement since he had contracted

a friendship with Delestang after having rendered certain services to his wife. He now detained Rougon for a moment or two and behaved towards him with the most refined courtliness. Constant rivals and opposed to each other in their very temperaments, these two skilful adversaries saluted each other at the termination of each of their duels, feeling that they were enemies of equal strength and looking forward to an endless series of return-combats. Rougon had previously wounded Marsy ; Marsy had now just wounded Rougon ; and so it would go on until one or other of them should be left dead on the field. It is very possible that neither would have cared to see the other absolutely ruined, for they derived pleasure from the constant rivalry between them, and their ceaseless struggles against each other provided them, with occupation. They had a vague sort of feeling, indeed, that they were a couple of counterpoises necessary for the equilibrium of the Empire ; one the shaggy fist which killed by a knock-down blow, the other the tapering gloved fingers which clutched the throat and strangled.

Delestang was now tortured by a painful embarrassment. He saw Rougon, and he did not know whether he ought to go and shake hands with him or not. In his perplexity, he glanced at Clorinde, who seemed absorbed in her duties and indifferent to everything else. Just now she was hurrying about the room with sandwiches and buns and rolls. However her husband thought he could gather instruction from a look which she cast at him, and he stepped up to Rougon nervously and began to justify himself.

“I hope, my dear friend, you don’t bear me any ill will,” he said. “I refused at first, but they forced me to accept. There are demands—”

Rougon here interrupted him. The Emperor, he said, had acted in his wisdom, and the country would find itself in excellent hands.

Delestang now took courage.

“I said all I could in your defence,” he continued. “We all did. But really, you know, you had gone a little too far. What especially damaged you is what you did in connection with the Charbonnels’ affairs ; the matter of the Sisters, you recollect—”

Monsieur de Marsy suppressed a smile.

“Oh, yes, the perquisition affair at the convent,” replied Rougon, with all the good humour of his successful days.

“ Well, amongst all the follies which my friends led me into committing, that was perhaps the only sensible and just act in my five months of power.”

He now went away, as he saw Du Poizat arrive and seize hold of Delestang. The prefect pretended not to see him. He had been in Paris for the last three days, keeping himself in obscurity, and waiting. He had apparently been successful in getting his prefecture changed, for he was expressing profuse gratitude, as he showed his irregular white teeth in a wolfish smile. As the new minister turned round, Merle, whom Madame Correur had just pushed forward, almost fell into his arms. The usher drooped his eyes like a great timid girl, while Madame Correur spoke warmly in his favour.

“ He is not a favourite in the office,” she said, “ because he silently protests against abuses ; and he’s seen some very strange ones under Monsieur Rougon !”

“ Yes, yes ; very strange ones, indeed,” Merle said. “ I could tell you a long story about them. Monsieur Rougon won’t be much regretted. Well, I’m not paid to love him, am I ? And he all but turned me adrift, too.”

The stalls in the great hall, through which Rougon was slowly passing, were now quite denuded of their wares. To please the Empress, who was the patroness of the charity, the visitors had carried everything away. The delighted stall-holders were talking of opening again in the evening with a fresh supply of goods. They were now counting up the money they had taken. Different sums were shouted out amidst peals of triumphant laughter. One lady had taken three thousand francs, another seven thousand, and another ten thousand. The last mentioned was radiant with delight at having made so much money.

Madame de Combelot was quite in despair. She had just disposed of her last rose, and customers were still thronging round her kiosk. She came out of it, and stepped across to Madame Bouchard to see if she could not give her something to sell, it did not matter what. The lucky-wheel, however, had likewise disposed of everything. A lady had just carried off the last remaining prize, a doll’s washing-basin. However, they hunted about persistently, and at last they found a bundle of tooth-picks, which had fallen on to the ground. Madame de Combelot carried them off with a shout of triumph. Madame Bouchard followed her, and they both mounted up into the kiosk.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" Madame de Combelot called out boldly, standing up, and collecting the men below her with a beckoning sweep of her plump arm. "This is all that we have left, a bundle of tooth-picks. There are twenty-five of them. I am going to put them up to auction."

The men crowded up, laughing, and waving their gloved hands in the air. Madame de Combelot's idea was hailed with the greatest enthusiasm.

"A tooth-pick!" she now cried. "We'll start it at five francs. Now, gentlemen, five francs!"

"Ten francs!" said a voice.

"Twelve francs!"

"Fifteen francs!"

Monsieur d'Escorailles now suddenly went up to twenty-five francs, and Madame Bouchard then quickly called out in her flutey voice :

"Sold for twenty-five francs!"

The other tooth-picks fetched still higher prices. Monsieur La Rouquette paid forty-three francs for the one that was knocked down to him. The Chevalier Rusconi, who had just made his appearance, forced up the bidding to seventy-two francs for the one that eventually fell to him. The last one, a very fragile one, and split, as Madame Combelot announced, telling her audience that she did not wish to impose upon them, was knocked down for a hundred and seventeen francs to an old gentleman, whose eyes glistened at the sight of the young woman's enthusiastic energy, with her bodice gaping open at each of her vigorous gestures.

"It is split, gentlemen, but it is still a serviceable article. We've got to a hundred and eight francs for it. A hundred and ten are bid over there! a hundred and eleven! a hundred and twelve! a hundred and thirteen! a hundred and fourteen! Going at a hundred and fourteen! It's worth more than that, gentlemen! A hundred and seventeen! A hundred and seventeen! Won't anyone say more than that? Sold, then, for a hundred and seventeen francs!"

Pursued by these shouted figures, Rougon left the hall. Hé slackened his steps when he got out on to the terrace near the fountain. A stormy-looking cloud was rising up in the sky in the distance. Below him, the Seine, greasy and dirty green, flowed sluggishly along past the dim quays, along which thick clouds of dust were sweeping. In the garden, puffs of heated

air shook the trees every now and then. Rougon made his way down beneath the great chestnuts. It was almost quite dark there, and the atmosphere was as damp and clammy as that of a vault. As he emerged into the great avenue, he saw the Charbournels sitting stiffly on the middle of a bench. They were quite transformed, and were dressed with much magnificence. The husband was wearing light-coloured trousers and a frock-coat nipped in at the waist, while his wife was dressed in a robe of lilac silk, over which she wore a light jacket, and her bonnet was brightly ornamented with scarlet flowers. Sitting astride one end of the bench was a raggedly-dressed man. He was quite destitute of under-linen, and he was wearing an old hunting-waistcoat in a shockingly shabby condition. He was gesticulating energetically, and gradually bringing himself nearer the Charbournels. It was Gilquin. He kept administering slaps with his hand to his canvas cap, which was slipping off his head.

“A parcel of scoundrels!” he exclaimed. “Has Theodore ever tried to cheat anyone out of a single sou? They invented a fine story about finding a military substitute in order to ruin me. Then, of course, I left them to get on as well as they could without me. Ah! they are afraid of me! They know quite well what my political opinions are. I have never belonged to Badinguet’s party.”

“I only regret one person down there,” he continued in a lower tone, reaching his head forward and rolling his eyes about sentimentally. “Ah! such an adorable woman, a lady of fashion! Oh! it was a charming intimacy! She was fair. I had some of her hair.”

Then, as he edged himself close up to Madame Charbonnel, he broke out into loud tones again.

“Well, old lady,” he said, “when are you going to take me with you to Plassans to taste those preserves of yours; the apples and the cherries and the sweetmeats? You’ve got your nest pretty well lined now, eh?”

The Charbournels seemed to be much annoyed by Gilquin’s familiarity.

“We are stopping in Paris for some time,” said Madame Charbonnel, stiffly, gathering up her lilac silk dress. “We shall probably spend six months here every year.”

“Ah, yes,” added her husband with an air of profound admiration, “Paris is the only place!”

The gusts of wind were now becoming stronger, and a troop of nurses with children passed hastily through the garden.

"We had better be getting home, my dear," continued Monsieur Charbonnel, turning to his wife, "if we don't want to get a soaking. Fortunately, we have only a yard or two to go."

They were staying at the Hôtel du Palais Royal in the Rue de Rivoli. Gilquin watched them walk off, and shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Mean, shabby animals!" he muttered. "Ah, they're all alike!"

Then he suddenly caught sight of Rougon. He slouched up towards him, giving his cap a slap.

"I haven't been to see you yet," he said. "I hope you're not offended. That mountebank of a Du Poizat has told you some fine stories about me, I dare say. They are all lies, my friend, as I can prove to you whenever you like. Well, I don't bear you any ill will; and I'll prove it by giving you my address, 25 Rue du Bon Puits, near the chapel, five minutes' walk from the barrier. If I can be of any use to you, you know, you have only just to let me know."

Then he took himself off with a slouching gait. He glanced round him for a moment or two, and then, shaking his fist at the Tuileries which showed gloomy and grey beneath the black sky at the end of the avenue, he cried :

"Long live the Republic!"

Rougon now left the garden and took his way up the Champs Élysées. He experienced a strong desire to go and look at his little house again in the Rue Marbeuf. He intended to quit his official residence in the morning and to go to live in his old home again. He felt no little mental lassitude mingled with a vague sadness, though he was perfectly calm and unexcited. He dreamt hazily of proving his powers by doing great things again some day. Every now and then he raised his head and looked at the sky. The storm did not seem inclined to break just yet. The horizon was streaked with ruddy clouds. Heavy peals of thunder sounded over the deserted avenue of the Champs Élysées, like the rumbling sound of a detachment of artillery at full galop, and the tops of the trees shook with the reverberation. As Rougon turned the corner of the Rue Marbeuf the first drops of rain began to fall.

A brougham was standing in front of the door of the house. Rougon found his wife examining the rooms, measuring the

windows and giving orders to an upholsterer. He felt much surprised, but she explained to him that she had just seen her brother, Monsieur Beulin-d'Orchère. The judge, who had already learnt of Rougon's fall, had hoped to overwhelm his sister by informing her of his approaching assumption of office as Minister of Justice, and he had ended by trying to create discord between her and her husband. Madame Rougon, however, had merely ordered her brougham to be brought round, and had at once gone off to prepare for their removal into their old house. She still preserved her calm, pale, nun-like face, and her unchangeable, quiet, domesticated manner. She went through the rooms with her muffled step, and resumed possession of the house which she had indued with a quite cloistral quietude. Her only thought was to be a faithful steward of the fortune with the administration of which she had been entrusted. Rougon was quite touched at seeing her dry spare face and all her scrupulous care and attention.

The storm now burst with tremendous violence. The thunder pealed and the rain came down in torrents, and Rougon was obliged to remain where he was for nearly three quarters of an hour. He wanted to walk back. The Champs Élysées was a mass of mud, yellow liquid mud, which stretched from the Arc de Triomphe to the Place de la Concorde like the bed of a freshly drained river. In the avenue there were only a very few pedestrians, who were trying carefully to pick their way along. The trees, heavily watered, stood dripping in the calm fresh air. Up in the heavens the storm had left behind it a wreath of broken coppery clouds and a low murky sky, from which fell a glimmer of weird, mournful light.

Rougon again fell back into his dreams for the future. A few stray drops of rain fell on to his hands and wetted them. His whole being felt very stiff and bruised, as though he had come into collision with some obstacle that had blocked his progress. Suddenly he heard a loud trampling behind him, and the noise of galloping hoofs which made the ground shake under him.

He turned round to look. It was a military escort which was dashing along through the mud of the road beneath the mournful glimmer of the coppery sky, lighting up the dim darkness of the Champs Élysées with the brilliance of uniforms. The party was on the way back from the Bois. At the head of the escort galloped some dragoons. In the middle

came a closed carriage, drawn by four horses, beside which rode two equerries in gorgeous gold-embroidered uniforms, and receiving, with the most imperturbable demeanour, the ceaseless splashing of the liquid mud, with which they were covered from head to foot. Inside the dim closed carriage there was only a child to be seen, the Prince Imperial, who was gazing out of the window, with his ten fingers and red nose pressing against the glass.

“Ah, it’s the little chap!” said a road-mender, with a smile, as he trundled his barrow.

Rougon had halted, looking thoughtful, and he stood there watching the escort as it went splashing along through the puddles and brushing against the lowermost leaves of the trees.

CHAPTER XIV.

ONE day in March, three years later, there was a very stormy sitting in the Corps Législatif. The address was being discussed for the first time.

Monsieur La Rouquette and Monsieur de Lamberthon, an old deputy, and the husband of a charming wife, were quietly drinking their glasses of grog in the refreshment-room opposite to each other.

“ Well, shall we go back into the chamber ? ” said Monsieur de Lamberthon, who had been straining his ear to listen. “ I fancy things are getting pretty warm there.”

Every now and then there could be heard the sounds of distant shouting and sudden roars like squalls of wind, followed by complete silence. Monsieur La Rouquette continued smoking with an air of utter indifference.

“ Oh, we needn’t go just yet,” he said ; “ I want to finish my cigar. They’ll let us know if we are wanted. I told them that they were to do so.”

They were the only two in the room, a sort of smart little café which had been established at the bottom of the narrow garden, which forms the corner of the quay and the Rue de Bourgogne. Painted a soft green, covered with a trellis of bamboos, and with lofty windows that opened right on to the trees in the garden, it looked like a conservatory that had been transformed into a refreshment-room for a garden party. It was panelled with mirrors ; the tables and counter were of red marble, and the seats were covered with green rep, drawn in with buttons. One of the windows was open, and through it there streamed in the soft air of the lovely afternoon, the close warmth of which was freshened by the breezes from the Seine.

“ The Italian war has filled the cup of his glory,” Monsieur La Rouquette now resumed, in continuation of a conversation that had been interrupted. “ To-day, in granting the country liberty, he displays all the greatness of his genius.”

He was speaking of the Emperor, and he went on to ex-

toll the November decrees, the more direct participation of the great state bodies in the policy of the sovereign, and the creation of ministers without portfolios for the purpose of representing the government in the Chambers. It was the restoration of constitutional government, he said, in all its most wholesome and desirable qualities. A new era, that of the liberal Empire, was commencing. Then he knocked the ash from his cigar in a transport of enthusiasm.

Monsieur de Lamberthon shook his head.

"I'm afraid he has gone a little too fast," he said. "It would have been better to be a little more deliberate ; there was no pressing hurry."

"Oh, yes, I assure you there was. It was quite necessary to do something," replied the young deputy, with animation. "It is just there that his genius—"

Here he lowered his voice, and began to explain the political situation with a profound expression. The addresses issued by the bishops on the subject of the Pope's temporal power, which was threatened by the government of Turin, were greatly disturbing the Emperor. Then, on the other hand, the opposition was growing more active, and an uneasy thrill was passing over the country. The moment had come for making an attempt to reconcile the different parties, and for the Emperor to try to win the political mal-contents over to himself by wise concessions. The despotic Empire had proved itself very defective ; the liberal Empire would be a blaze of glory, by which the whole of Europe would be illumined.

"Well, I'm still of opinion that he has gone too fast," repeated Monsieur de Lamberthon, who continued to shake his head. "It's all very well to talk about the liberal Empire ; but what it will all lead to we can't tell, my dear sir ; we can't tell ; we can't tell."

He repeated this expression three times, each time in a different tone, and sweeping his hand through the empty air. Monsieur La Rouquette said nothing further, but merely finished his glass of grog. The two deputies, however, still sat where they were, gazing blankly out of the open window, as though they were looking for the unknown fate of the liberal Empire on the other side of the quay, in the direction of the palace of the Tuilleries, which was lying in a thick grey haze. Behind them, at the other end of the corridors, the

muttered hum of voices was now sounding afresh, like the distant rumble of an approaching storm.

Monsieur de Lamberthon turned his head uneasily.

“It’s Rougon who is going to reply, isn’t it ?” he asked after a pause.

“Yes, I believe so,” replied Monsieur La Rouquette, with an air of reserve.

“He compromised himself sadly,” the old deputy continued. “The Emperor has made a singular choice in selecting him as a minister without a portfolio, and commissioning him to defend his new policy.”

Monsieur La Rouquette did not once express an opinion. He stroked his fair moustache slowly.

“The Emperor knows Rougon,” he said at last.

Then, in quite a different tone, he exclaimed :

“I tell you what, this grog is very poor stuff. I’m dreadfully thirsty, and I think I shall have a glass of syrup.”

He ordered one, and, after some hesitation, Monsieur de Lamberthon decided that he would have a glass of Madeira. Then they began to talk of Madame de Lamberthon, and the old deputy chided his young colleague for the rarity of his visits. The latter was lounging back on the settee, furtively admiring himself in the mirrors, and enjoying the soft green tint of the walls, and the bright freshness of the room, which seemed almost like a pavilion reared in a princely forest for the assignations of lovers.

Just at this moment an usher appeared in a breathless condition.

“Monsieur La Rouquette, you are wanted immediately, immediately !”

As the young deputy made a gesture of vexation, the usher stooped down to his ear and told him in a whisper that he had been sent by Monsieur de Marsy, the president of the Chamber, himself.

“They are in want of everybody, indeed ; so come at once,” he said in conclusion in a louder voice.

Monsieur de Lamberthon at once rushed off to the chamber. Monsieur La Rouquette was following him, when he appeared to change his mind. It suddenly occurred to him that it would be advisable to hunt up all the deputies who were lounging in different parts of the building, and send them back to their places. He hastened first into the Conference Hall, a

beautiful apartment lighted by a glazed roof. It contained a gigantic mantelpiece of green marble, ornamented with the figures of two naked women in recumbent attitudes, carved in white marble. Despite the warmth of the afternoon, a great wood fire was burning there. Three deputies sat half dozing round the huge table with their eyes fixed either on the pictures on the wall or on the famous clock, which was only wound up once a year. A fourth deputy was standing in front of the fire, warming his back, and pretending to examine with feelings of emotion a statuette of Henri IV. in plaster which stood at the other end of the room, over a trophy of banners that had been captured at Marengo, Austerlitz, and Jena. As Monsieur La Rouquette went from one to the other, bidding them hurry off at once to the chamber, they started up as though they had been suddenly awakened, and hastened away in procession.

In his burst of enthusiasm, Monsieur La Rouquette was now going to rush off to the library, when it occurred to him that it would be prudent to give a glance into the lavatory. There he found Monsieur de Combelot, with his hands plunged in a large washing-basin, rubbing them gently, and smiling admiringly at their whiteness. He did not show the least excitement, though he at once made preparations for returning to his seat. But before doing so, he lingered some time wiping his hands on a warm towel, which he then replaced in the copper-doored stove. Then he went and stood before a lofty mirror, and combed his handsome black beard with a little pocket-comb.

There was no one in the library. The books were slumbering on their oak shelves. The two huge tables, with their covers, stood severely bare. The book-desks attached to the arms of the methodically-arranged chairs were folded up, and covered with a slight coating of dust.

“There is no one here!” said Monsieur La Rouquette in quite a loud voice which sounded strange amid all this silence and solitude, in which there lingered a smell of papers and documents; and then he closed the door with a bang.

Next he began to search a series of passages and halls. He crossed through the Distribution Hall, which was floored with marble from the Pyrenees, and in which his steps echoed as though he had been walking through the nave of a church. An usher now told him that a deputy he knew, Monsieur de la Villardière, was showing the palace to a lady and gentleman; and he set about finding him. He hastened into the room known as

General Foy's Hall, a severe-looking place where four statues of Mirabeau, General Foy, Bailly, and Casimir Périer, always command the respectful admiration of visitors from the country. It was in this neighbourhood, in the Throne Room, that he at last discovered Monsieur de la Villardière, with a fat lady on one side of him and a fat gentleman on the other, an influential elector and notary of Dijon and his wife.

"You are wanted," said Monsieur La Rouquette. "You will go back to your place at once, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll go at once," replied the deputy.

But he could not make his escape. The fat gentleman, much impressed by the magnificence of the hall, with its glittering gilding and mirrored panels, clung firmly to his "dear deputy," and would not let him go. He was asking for explanations of Delacroix's paintings, great decorative figures representing the seas and rivers of France; *Mediterraneum Mare, Oceanus, Ligeris, Rhenus, Sequana, Rhodanus, Garumna, Araris*. The Latin words puzzled him.

"*Ligeris*, that is the Loire," Monsieur de la Villardière explained.

The Dijon notary nodded his head briskly to signify that he understood. His wife was examining the throne, a chair slightly higher than the others, and placed on a wide platform. She stood some little distance away from it, contemplating it with reverent emotion. Presently she summoned up sufficient courage to go up to it, and, furtively raising the covering, she touched the gilded wood, and felt at the crimson velvet.

Monsieur La Rouquette was now scouring the right wing of the palace, with its interminable corridors and offices and committee-rooms. He returned by way of the Hall of the Four Columns, where young deputies indulge in dreams as they gaze at the statues of Brutus and Solon and Lycurgus. Then he cut across the large writing hall, and skirted hastily round a semi-circular gallery, like a sort of low crypt, as dim and as bare as a church, and lighted both day and night by gas. Then, quite breathless, and dragging after him the little regiment of deputies whom he had taken captive, he threw open a mahogany door, decorated with gold stars. Monsieur de Combélot, his hands quite white, and his beard neatly combed, followed him, Monsieur de la Villardière, who had made his escape from his two constituents, came on close behind and they all rushed together into the meeting hall where the other deputies

were angrily standing up in their places, and shouting and waving their arms at a member who was speaking, and who seemed perfectly unconcerned by their demonstrations against him.

“Order! order! order!” they cried.

“Order! order!” cried Monsieur La Rouquette and his friends, still more loudly without being in the least aware of what was going on.

The uproar was frightful. The deputies were stamping their feet angrily, and keeping up a rolling fusillade by violently rattling the lids of their desks. Screaming, yelping voices shrieked out shrill fife-like notes in the midst of deep bass cries, sustained and prolonged like the sounds of an organ. Every now and then the uproar seemed to be dying away, and the deputies grew quieter; but then fresh cries broke out again in the midst of the subsiding clamour, and fresh shouts sounded through the chamber.

“It is detestable! it is intolerable!”

“Make him withdraw it!”

“Yes, yes! withdraw it!”

But the cry that was ceaselessly repeated and accentuated by the stamping of heels was the cry of “Order! order! order!” shouted out hoarsely and huskily from dry throats.

The speaker in the tribune now crossed his arms over his breast. He gazed calmly at the furiously excited deputies shrieking and waving their arms. Twice he attempted to continue his speech, as the tumult seemed subsiding, but each time he opened his mouth there came a renewal of the storm in greater violence than before, and a fresh outburst of frantic opposition. The din in the Chamber was fairly ear-splitting.

Monsieur de Marsy, who was standing up behind his presidential desk, with his hand upon the button of his bell, was ringing a continuous summons to order in the midst of the scene of wild confusion. His long pale face was perfectly calm and unexcited. He once stopped ringing for a moment or two, quietly drew down his wristbands, and then applied himself to his bell again. A slight sceptical smile, which was almost habitual to him, was playing round the edges of his thin lips.

“Gentlemen, be good enough to allow—” was all he said, as the tumult seemed to be subsiding.

“I call upon the speaker,” he continued, when comparative silence had at last been obtained, “to explain the words he has just made use of.”

The speaker, bending forward and leaning on the edge of the tribune, repeated the phrase, accentuating it by a determined movement of his chin.

“I have said that what took place on the second of December was a crime—”

He was not allowed to proceed further. The storm broke out again. A deputy with hotly-flushed cheeks called him a murderer. Another applied such a filthy term to him that the shorthand writers smiled and refrained from reporting it. The shouts increased in violence, and amongst them could be heard the shrill voice of Monsieur La Rouquette.

“He is insulting the Emperor! He is insulting France!” he cried.

Monsieur de Marsy sat down with a dignified air.

“I call the speaker to order,” he said.

Then there came a long interval of wild excitement. It was no longer the same drowsy Corps Législatif that five years previously had voted a credit of a hundred thousand francs for the Prince Imperial’s baptism. On a bench towards the left, four deputies were applauding the language which had been used by their colleague from the speaker’s tribune. There were now five of them who attacked the Empire. They assailed it perpetually, refused to recognise it, and voted against it with an obstinate persistency which they hoped would have the effect of gradually exciting the whole country against it. These deputies kept on their feet, forming a tiny group in the midst of an overwhelming majority; and they replied to the threats and shaken fists and clamorous opposition of the Chamber without the least sign of discouragement, unflinchingly enthusiastic that they would have their revenge by-and-by.

The very hall itself, echoing with all this feverish excitement, seemed changed. The tribune beneath the President’s desk had been set up again. The coldness of the marble and the pompous display of columns round the amphitheatre received a warmth from the ardent oratory; and, amid the storms of heated debates, the light that fell perpendicularly down from the window in the ceiling seemed to set the long tiers of crimson velvet seats ablaze. The massive presidential desk, with its severe panels, acquired life and animation from the irony and impertinency of Monsieur de Marsy, whose irreproachable frock-coat and slight fragile figure formed but a narrow line against the nude antique figures of the *bas-relief* behind him. The sym-

bolical statues of Public Order and Liberty, in their niches between the pairs of columns, alone preserved their inanimate countenances and their pupil-less, stony eyes. But what gave more than anything else an appearance of increased life to the place was the much larger number of spectators who were now present, all excitedly leaning forward and eagerly following the discussion. The reporters had a special gallery set apart for them. High aloft, near the gilded cornice, numbers of heads were craned forward. They belonged to a dense swarm of the lower orders, who crowded together up there, making the deputies sometimes glance up uneasily, as though they had suddenly fancied they could hear the rushing tramp of a revolted rabble.

The speaker in the tribune was still waiting to be allowed to continue.

“Now, gentlemen, I will go on,” he said, in a voice that was drowned by the noise which the deputies still continued to make.

He paused for a moment, and then resumed in a louder voice that made itself heard above the tumult.

“If the Chamber refuses to hear me, I shall leave this tribune with a protest.”

“Go on! Go on!” cried several voices.

“Go on; we shall know very well how to answer you,” growled out a deep voice which seemed to come from some deputy with a bad cough.

Suddenly there was complete silence. From all the seats and galleries every head was craned forward to look at Rougon, who had just made this observation. He was sitting in the front row with his elbows resting on the marble ledge. His broad bent back was perfectly rigid and motionless, except when he now and then slightly swayed his shoulders backwards and forwards. His face was buried in his hands and could not be seen. He was carefully following the speaker’s words. His own speech was awaited with great eagerness and curiosity, for he had not spoken at all since he had been appointed a minister without a portfolio. He was probably quite aware of the many eyes that were fixed eagerly upon him, and he turned his head and glanced round the Chamber. Opposite to him, in the ministers’ gallery, sat Clorinde, in a violet dress. She was resting her elbows on the red velvet balustrade, and was gazing at him with calm bold eyes. For a moment or two their eyes met, but they looked at each other without any smile of

recognition, and just as though they had been perfect strangers. Then Rougon resumed his previous position, burying his face in his hands, and began to listen to the speaker again.

“Gentlemen,” said the latter, “I will now proceed. The decree of the twenty-fourth of November professes to concede certain liberties, but they are perfectly illusory. We are still very far away from the principles of '89 that are so ostentatiously inscribed at the head of the Imperial Constitution. If the government persists in keeping itself armed with exceptional legislation, if it continues to force its own candidates upon the country, if it refuses to free the press from an arbitrary control, if, in a word, it still keeps France in fetters, all the seeming concessions which it makes, will amount to nothing but lying—”

Here the president interrupted him.

“I cannot permit the speaker to use such a term,” he said.

“Hear, hear!” cried the deputies on the right.

The speaker went on again, using more moderate language. He now made a strong effort to be more temperate in his expressions, and he spoke in carefully rounded periods couched in perfectly chosen words and articulated in tones of deep seriousness. Monsieur de Marsy, however, angrily objected to almost every expression he used. The speaker then launched out into abstract oratory, speaking in vague terms and making use of a string of long words, which so completely veiled his real thoughts that the president was obliged to leave him alone. Then the orator suddenly returned to his old manner.

“I go back now to what I was saying before. My friends and myself refuse to support the first paragraph of the address in answer to the speech from the throne—”

“We can get on very well without you!” cried a voice.

A loud burst of laughter broke out along the benches.

“We shall not vote in favour of the first paragraph of the address,” continued the speaker, tranquilly, “unless our amendment is adopted. We cannot join in returning exaggerated thanks to the Chief of the State for what is so hampered and restricted. Liberty is indivisible. It cannot be cut up into bits and distributed in shares like alms.”

Shouts now burst out from every part of the Chamber.

“Your liberty is nothing but license!”

“Don't talk about alms! You yourself are begging for a spurious unwholesome popularity!”

“You'd be cutting off heads if you had your own way!”

"Our amendment," continued the speaker, as though he had heard nothing of these cries and shouts, "demands the abrogation of the Public Safety Act, the liberty of the press, freedom of elections—"

Here there was another outbreak of laughter. One of the deputies had said, loudly enough to be heard by his neighbours: "Ah, my fine fellow, you'll get nothing of all that!" and another kept making mocking comments upon every sentence that dropped from the speaker's lips. The greater number of them, however, accompanied his sentences by rapping their paper-knives on their desks, producing a rattling sound something like a continuous roll of kettle-drums, which quite drowned the speaker's voice. He struggled on, however, to the end. Drawing himself up to his full height, he hurled out his concluding words in a voice that made itself heard above all the disorderly uproar.

"Yes, we are revolutionists, if by revolutionists you mean men of progress who are resolved to win liberty for themselves! Refuse the people liberty, and one day they will seize it for themselves!"

Then he came down from the tribune, in the midst of a fresh outburst of fierce cries. The deputies were no longer laughing gleefully like a lot of school-boys. They had risen to their feet, and, turning simultaneously towards the left, they all shouted out together: "Order! order!" The speaker had now regained his place, where he remained standing in the midst of his friends. There was a good deal of surging about, and the majority seemed inclined to throw themselves upon these five men who stood looking at them defiantly with pale faces. Monsieur de Marsy, however, now angrily rang his bell, glancing up, as he did so, at the gallery from which the ladies were retreating with an appearance of alarm.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is disgraceful—"

"I do not wish," he continued, in a loud and authoritative voice, as soon as silence was restored, "to have to make a second call to order. I confine myself to saying that it is disgraceful in the extreme to launch from this tribune menaces which dishonour it."

A triple burst of applause greeted these words from the President. The deputies cried "bravo!" and rattled their paper-knives loudly, but this time in approbation. The speaker wanted to say something in reply, but his friends restrained

him. The tumult then gradually subsided and sunk down into a mere buzz of private conversation.

"I now call upon His Excellency Monsieur Rougon," said Monsieur de Marsy, in a quiet tone.

A thrill of excitement, accompanied by a sigh of satisfaction, now ran through the Chamber, and it was followed by an attitude of the most earnest attention. Rougon had made his way heavily up into the tribune, slouching his shoulders. He did not at first turn his eyes upon his audience, but he laid down in front of him a bundle of notes, pushed the glass of sugared water out of his way, and stretched his hands over the narrow mahogany desk as though he were taking possession of it. Then at last, leaning against the back of the tribune, he raised his face. He did not seem any older. His square brow, his large well-shaped nose and his long cheeks, on which not a wrinkle showed, still had a pale rosy tint, the fresh complexion of some little country-town notary. It was only his thick hair that had undergone any change. It was grizzling now, and growing thinner about his temples, exposing his big ears. Half-closing his eyes, he glanced round the Chamber, but still he did not begin to speak. For a moment or two he seemed to be looking for some one ; then his eyes rested upon the face of Clorinde, who was attentively leaning forward, and he began to speak in a monotonous unimpassioned tone.

"We too are revolutionists, if by that term is meant men of progress who are resolved to restore to the country, piece by piece, every wise and prudent liberty—"

"Hear ! hear !"

"What government, gentlemen, has ever given a more generous measure of liberal reforms than the Empire, whose alluring programme you have just heard sketched out ? I shall not formally refute the speech of the honourable member who has just sat down. I shall content myself by proving to you that the genius and noble heart of the Emperor have exceeded even the demands of the most bitter opponents of his rule. Yes, gentlemen, of his own accord, our sovereign has restored to the people that power with which it entrusted him during a period of public danger. A magnificent spectacle, and one to which history affords but few parallels ! We can easily understand the disgust that is felt by certain lawless individuals. There is nothing left for them but to attack our intentions for the future, and to carp at

the measure of liberty which has been already granted. You have fully understood and appreciated, gentlemen, the noble act of the twenty-fourth of November ; and in the first paragraph of the address you have gladly expressed to the Emperor your deep gratitude for his magnanimity and for his confidence in the discretion of the Corps Législatif. To adopt the amendment which has been proposed to you would be offering him a gratuitous insult ; I do not even hesitate to say that it would be baseness. Consult your own consciences, gentlemen, ask yourselves whether you do not feel that you are free. Liberty has now been granted whole and entire. I can guarantee that much."

A prolonged outburst of applause here interrupted him. He had gradually come forward to the edge of the tribune, and, slightly stooping and extending his right hand, he raised his voice which flowed forth with wonderful power. Behind him, Monsieur de Marsy, as he lay back listening in his chair, was smiling vaguely with the wondering air of an amateur at the sight of some brilliant professional performance. In the midst of the loud cheering of the Chamber, deputies kept bending forward and whispering to each other their surprised admiration. Clorinde was leaning on the crimson velvet balustrade quite wrapt in earnest attention.

Rougon now continued his speech.

"To-day," he said, "the hour for which we have all been so impatiently waiting has at length struck. There is no longer any danger in making prosperous France free France also. The anarchical passions are dead. The energy of the Sovereign and the solemn determination of the people have for ever annihilated those abominable epochs of public perversity. Liberty became possible upon the day when that faction which had so obstinately ignored the fundamental bases of sound government was defeated ; and it is for this reason that the Emperor has felt himself justified in laying aside the stern strong hand, and in divesting himself of excessive prerogatives as a now useless burden, considering that, his rule being now unassailable by discussion, discussion may be freely allowed. For the rest, he has not shunned making further promises for the future, and he will carry out his task of enfranchisement to the end, giving back one liberty after another at such times as shall seem fitting to his wisdom. From to-day it is a programme of continual progress that it will be our duty to support in this assembly."

"You, yourself, were the minister of the bitterest and sternest

despotism!" interrupted one of the five deputies on the left, rising excitedly from his seat.

"The purveyors for Cayenne and Lambessa have no right to speak in the name of liberty!" cried another, passionately.

An outburst of murmurs followed these interruptions. Several of the deputies, who did not quite catch what was said, bent forward and questioned their neighbours. Monsieur de Marsy pretended not to have heard, and he confined himself to threatening to call the interrupting deputies to order.

"I have just been reproached—" Rougon resumed.

Shouts, however, now rose from the right and prevented him from continuing.

"No, no! Don't reply!"

"Such insults are not worthy of notice!"

Rougon now reduced the chamber to silence by a gesture, and then resting his two fists on the edge of the tribune, he turned towards the left with the expression of a wild boar at bay.

"I will not reply," he said, calmly.

All that he had yet said was merely introductory; and now, although he had stated that he did not intend to refute the accusations of the deputy of the left, he entered upon a minute analysis of his speech. He began by clearly stating the whole of his opponent's arguments. He spoke of them airily and with perfect fairness and candour, as though he felt they were of no weight whatever and merely needed a word for their utter worthlessness to be shown. This treatment of them was extremely effective. But, as he went on, he appeared to forget them entirely and without replying to a single one of them, he attacked the weakest of them with indescribable violence and quite overwhelmed it beneath a flood of words. He was hailed with bursts of cheers, and his speech was a great success. His huge body seemed to fill the tribune, and he swayed his shoulders in rhythm with his periods. His oratory was of a mediocre, inartistic order, bristling with legal points and trite commonplaces, which he enunciated in thundering tones. He shouted and bellowed out trivialities; and his only oratorical gift was his fund of breath, which was immense and quite inexhaustible, enabling him to talk on magniloquently for hours together without having the least fear of exhausting himself.

After he had spoken for an hour without a break, he gulped down a mouthful of water, and panted a little as he arranged his notes in front of him.

"Rest yourself!" cried several deputies.

He did not feel at all tired, however, and he wanted to get his speech finished.

"What is it, gentlemen, that is demanded of you?"

"Hush! Hush!"

Every face was now again fixed upon him in silent straining attention. At certain bursts of his oratory a something seemed to sweep through the Chamber from one end to the other, as though a gust of wind had blown through it.

"What is demanded of you, gentlemen, is that you should repeal the Public Safety Act. I will not now refer to that ever-accursed time which made that act a necessary weapon. It was necessary to re-assure the country, to save France from a fresh cataclysm. To-day that weapon is sheathed. The government, which has always used it with the greatest prudence, I will even say with the greatest moderation—"

"That is true, quite true!"

"The government now makes use of it only in certain altogether exceptional cases. It annoys no one except those sectaries who still cherish the sinful madness of wishing for the return of the basest days of our history. Search through our towns, search through our villages, everywhere you will find peace and prosperity. Inquire of all well-disposed men, and you will not find one who finds any hardship in that law which is imputed to us as such a great crime. I repeat that, in the paternal hands of the government, it continues to shield society against all hateful attempts, the success of which is henceforth impossible. Honest, well-disposed men have no occasion to trouble themselves about its existence. Leave it to slumber where it is, until our sovereign shall feel justified in doing away with it himself. What else is demanded of you, gentlemen? Freedom of elections, the liberty of the press, every kind of liberty that can be imagined. Let me stop here for a moment to glance at the great things which the Empire has already accomplished. Round about me, wherever I turn my eyes, I see public liberties increasing and bearing splendid fruits. I feel the profoundest emotion. France, once fallen so low, is now fast recovering, and is giving to the world the example of a nation winning its own freedom by its good behaviour. The days of trial are now over. There is no longer any question of a dictatorship, or of despotism. We are all workers in the cause of liberty—"

“ Bravo ! bravo !”

“ Freedom of elections is demanded. Is not universal suffrage on the widest basis the primordial source of the Empire’s existence ? Doubtless the Empire recommends its candidates. Does not the revolutionary party support its own with shameless audacity ? We are attacked, and we defend ourselves. Nothing could be fairer than that. Our opponents want to gag us, to bind us hand and foot, and to reduce us to the condition of dead bodies. That is what we can never allow. Our love for our country requires that we should always advise it and tell it where its true interests lie. It still remains the absolute master of its destinies. It votes and we bend to its wishes. Those members of the Opposition who belong to this assembly, where they enjoy entire liberty of speech, are themselves a proof of our respect for the decrees of universal suffrage. The revolutionary party must find fault with the nation, for it is the nation that supports the Empire by overwhelming majorities. Every barrier against the supremacy of the people in parliament is now broken down. Our Sovereign has been graciously pleased to grant to the great bodies of the State a more direct participation in his policy, and to give them a conspicuous proof of his confidence in them. Henceforth you will be able to discuss the measures of the government, to exercise the right of amendment, in the fullest degree, as well as to express your wishes. Every year the address will form, as it were, an interview between the Emperor and the representatives of the nation, at which you will be able to say anything you wish with perfect freedom. It is amid free and open discussion that powerful states spring into being. The tribune is restored to you, this tribune which so many orators, whose names history has preserved, has made illustrious. A parliament which discusses is a parliament that works. And, to tell you the real truth, I am glad to see here a group of deputies belonging to the opposition party. There will thus always be amongst us opponents who will try to find us at fault, and who, by doing so, will be the means of making our good faith show conspicuously. We ask the most generous allowances for them. We are not afraid of either passion or scandal, or of the abuse of freedom of speech, dangerous though these things be.

“ As for the press, gentlemen, under no government determined upon making itself respected has it enjoyed greater freedom than it does at present. Every great question and

every serious interest has its organs. The government only opposes the propagation of dangerous doctrines and the purveying of poisonous ideas. For the honourable portion of the press, which is the great voice of public opinion, I assure you that we entertain the most absolute respect. It assists us in our task ; it is the tool of the age. If the government has taken it into its own hands, it is only to keep it from falling into those of its enemies—”

Approving laughs here greeted the speaker. Rougon was now drawing near the conclusion of his speech. He gripped the frame-work of the tribune with his clutching fingers, throwing his whole body forward and sweeping the air with his right arm. His words flowed forth in a sonorous torrent. In the midst of his glowing praises of the new liberal policy, he suddenly seemed overcome with a wild excitement. He shot his fist forward as though he were striking at something and threatening some unseen foe in empty space. This invisible enemy was the red spectre. In a few dramatic sentences he showed them this red spectre shaking its blood-dripping banner and waving its incendiary torch, leaving streams of mud and gore in its train. The sounds of the alarm-bell in the days of revolution, the hissing of musket-balls, the sacking of the Bank and the stolen and divided money of the citizens, all rang out in his voice.

Then the deputies turned pale in their seats while Rougon then calmed down, and fairly concluded by speaking of the Emperor in warm bursts of laudation, which suggested the swaying to and fro of a smoking censer.

“God be thanked!” said he. “We are under the protection of this Prince whom Providence in its infinite mercy has selected to save us. We can safely rest beneath the shelter of his great wisdom. He has taken us by the hand, and he is leading us step by step through the breakers to the safety of the harbour.”

The Chamber now echoed with vociferous applause. For nearly ten minutes the proceedings were interrupted. A crowd of deputies rushed to meet the Minister as he returned to his seat, with perspiration streaming down his face and his sides still panting heavily. Monsieur La Rouquette, Monsieur de Combelot, and a hundred others poured forth their congratulations, and thrust out their arms to try and grasp his hand as he passed them. The whole Chamber seemed to be quivering

with excitement. The occupants of the galleries, too, shouted and gesticulated. Beneath the sun-lit window, in the midst of the gilding and marble, and the severe magnificence mingling the attributes of a temple with those of a business-office, there was all the excited commotion of a public meeting, bursts of doubting laughter, shouted exclamations of astonishment and of wild admiration, all the noisy clamour, in a word, of a passion-swayed crowd.

At that very moment as the eyes of Monsieur de Marsy and Clorinde happened to meet, they both nodded their heads in confession of the great man's triumph. The speech which Rougon had just delivered was his first step up that splendid ladder of fortune which was destined to carry him to such a great height.

A deputy now mounted the tribune. He had a clean-shaven face, a waxy complexion, and long yellow hair, the thin curls of which fell down upon his shoulders. Standing stiff and rigid, he began to turn over some big sheets of paper, the manuscript of a speech, which he finally commenced to read in an unctuous voice.

“Silence, gentlemen, silence!” cried the usher,

The speaker began by asking for some explanations from the government. He showed great irritation at the dilatory attitude of France in the presence of the threats of Italy against the Holy See. The temporal power of the Pope, he said, was the key-stone of his spiritual power, and the address ought to contain a formally expressed hope, a command even, for its absolute maintenance. The speaker then launched out into historical references, and showed that the forces of Christianity had established political order in Europe many centuries before the treaties of 1815. Then, in words that breathed fear and consternation, he went on to say that he beheld with the greatest alarm the old European society vanishing in the midst of popular convulsions. Every now and then, as he indulged in some too directly hostile allusion to the King of Italy, murmurs were heard through the Chamber; but the compact group of clerical deputies on the right, nearly a hundred in number, listened attentively and accentuated his slightest references by the expression of their approval, applauding every time he named the Pope, and reverently inclining their heads in a slight bow.

The concluding sentence of the speech was much cheered.

"It distresses me," said the speaker, "to see proud Venice, the Queen of the Adriatic, become the obscure vassal of Turin."

Rougon, whose neck was still wet with perspiration, his voice hoarse and his great body exhausted by his previous exertions, insisted upon replying at once. It was a notable sight. He made a parade of his fatigue, exhibited it ostentatiously, dragging himself wearily into the tribune, where he began by stammering out some weak faint words. He complained bitterly at finding that the adversaries of the government numbered men of position who had hitherto been so loyal to the Imperial institutions. They surely did not grasp the position of affairs. They could not wish to swell the ranks of the revolutionists and to weaken a power who made constant efforts to assure the triumph of religion. Then, turning towards the deputies on the right, he addressed them with pathetic gestures and spoke to them with a humility that was full of craftiness, as though they were powerful foes, and the only ones whom he really feared.

His voice had gradually recovered all its previous force, and he filled the whole chamber with its thundering volume, accompanying his words by striking his breast heavily with his fist.

"We are accused of irreligion. It is a lie! We are the reverent children of the Church, and it is our happiness to be faithful believers. Yes, gentlemen, faith is our guide and our support in this task of governing which we often find so difficult and so trying. What, indeed, would become of us if we did not trustfully leave ourselves in the hands of Providence? Our only pretension is to be the humble executants of its designs, the docile instruments that carry out the wishes of God. It is this which enables us to speak out freely and to be able to accomplish some little good. And, gentlemen, I am happy to be able to take this opportunity of here bending my knee with all the fervour of a true Catholic's heart before the sovereign Pontiff, before that august old man whose watchful and devoted daughter France will ever remain."

Before he had well finished, the chamber rang with applause. His triumph was becoming an apotheosis. The deputies were wild with enthusiasm.

On leaving the Chamber, Clorinde looked about for Rougon. They had not exchanged a word for the last three years.

When he made his appearance, looking younger and lighter, having in a single hour given the lie to the whole of his previous political life, ready now to satisfy, under the fiction of constitutionalism, his craving need for power, she yielded to an impulsive feeling and stepped towards him, stretching out her hand, while her damp eyes looked at him softly and tenderly.

“ Ah ! ” she said, “ in spite of everything, you really are a wonderfully clever fellow ! ”

THE END.

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